

The Choice Is Yours **After Two Years:** **An Evaluation**

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The Choice Is Yours

After Two Years: An Evaluation

Executive Summary

To provide context for the key findings from this evaluation, the executive summary begins with a brief overview of *The Choice Is Yours* program, including the impetus for the program, the relationship of the program to open enrollment policies and other efforts to ensure educational equity in Minnesota’s public schools, and the nature of school choice options offered through the program. This overview is followed by a brief description of how the report is organized and the methods guiding the evaluation. Key findings are then summarized and conclusions drawn regarding the strengths and weaknesses of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Overview

In 2000, the settlement of educational adequacy lawsuits filed against the State of Minnesota by the Minneapolis Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Minneapolis parents resulted in an inter- and intra-district voluntary desegregation initiative known as *The Choice Is Yours*. The program provides qualifying Minneapolis families with enhanced access to suburban schools and selected magnet schools within the Minneapolis school district under the state’s open enrollment policy. Per the settlement, an evaluation of *The Choice Is Yours* program is to be conducted to determine whether:

1. the educational opportunities available to Minneapolis students were enhanced, and
2. participation in the inter-district transfer program improves the academic achievement of students.

Minnesota’s Open Enrollment Policy

Minnesota Statute 124D.03 allows all of Minnesota’s public school students the opportunity to apply to attend school outside of the school district in which they live. More than 30,000 Minnesota students enrolled in non-resident district in 2002-03. Students must apply to the school district of their choice by January 15 for the following fall to receive the best chance of being admitted. Families generally provide their own transportation. No tuition is charged for open enrollment students.

***The Choice Is Yours*: Suburban Choice Schools**

Under the inter-district transfer portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program (“suburban choice”), Minneapolis residents who qualify for free or reduced price lunch are eligible to receive

priority placement in participating K-12 schools in eight suburban school districts when they apply for open enrollment by the January 15 deadline. The State of Minnesota provides transportation to these suburban schools. Beginning with the 2001-02 school year a minimum of 500 spaces each year were set aside across the eight suburban school districts for students who live within the city of Minneapolis. For more information on student and school eligibility, see Section 1: Participation.

The Choice Is Yours: Minneapolis Choice Magnet Schools

Minneapolis residents who qualified for free or reduced price lunch are also eligible to receive priority placement in participating K-8 magnet schools within the Minneapolis Public School District under the intra-district transfer portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program (“Minneapolis choice”). The Minneapolis Public School provides transportation to city schools according to school district policies on attendance zones and walking limits. A set percentage of available spaces in Kindergarten and in grades 1-5 are made available for eligible students at the Minneapolis choice magnet schools. For more information on student and school eligibility, see Section 1: Participation.

The Choice Is Yours and Minnesota’s Desegregation Rule

Minnesota Rule 3535, Adopted Permanent Rules Relating to Desegregation,¹ addresses issues of racial isolation and educational equity in Minnesota schools and school districts through the identification of “racially isolated” schools and school districts. “Racially isolated school districts” have a district-wide enrollment of minority students that exceeds the enrollment of minority students of any adjoining district by more than 20 percent. Similarly, in “racially isolated schools” the enrollment of minority students exceeds the district average by more than 20 percent.

If a school is identified as racially isolated as a result of segregation, that is, intentional, discriminatory acts, then the district is required to develop and implement a plan to remedy the segregation. When racial isolation is not the result of an act(s) of segregation, districts must develop and implement a plan to voluntarily integrate its racially isolated schools. If a school district is racially isolated, the isolated district and each of its adjoining school districts are required to prepare a plan to offer cross-district opportunities to improve integration. Districts that are not adjoining but for whom it might be geographically feasible to participate in cross-district planning may choose to participate.

The West Metro Education Program (WMEP) is one such voluntary consortium of one urban and nine suburban school districts in the Minneapolis metropolitan area formed in 1989 to cooperatively address integration issues in the west metro area. *The Choice Is Yours* program is included in the WMEP desegregation plan. Eight of the nine suburban school districts in WMEP are participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program. For more information on the characteristics of the participating school districts, including geographic location and economic and social indicators, see Section 1: Participation.

¹ For further information on Minnesota’s Desegregation Rule, see <http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/arule/3535/>.

How to Read This Report

The full report presents findings from the state authorized evaluation of the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Figure E1 summarizes the evaluation topics, guiding questions, and related data sources. The reader is instructed to keep in mind that this evaluation was designed to focus primarily on the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program, but includes some data on the intra-district (Minneapolis choice) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, as well.

Throughout this report, the results reflect several subgroups of participants and non-participants with regard to *The Choice Is Yours* program. Subgroups #1-3 receive the greatest attention in this study, as they represent the population of students who were eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program and their parents. When it was not possible to disaggregate the data, as in examining student achievement and attendance data, subgroups #2 and #3 are combined into one (#4) representing all of the eligible students who chose to remain in the Minneapolis public schools, whether they chose to attend one of the Minneapolis choice magnet schools (#2) or another public school in the district (#3).² Finally, subgroups 5 and 6 represent students who were *not* eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program but attend the choice schools; they are used for comparison, only.

Participants:

1. Suburban choice participants = inter-district transfer students
2. Minneapolis choice participants = intra-district transfer students

Non-participants:

3. Eligible, non-participants = eligible students who chose neither the inter-district nor the intra-district transfer option, but remained in a Minneapolis public school
4. Eligible, non-suburban participants = eligible students who chose to not enroll in a suburban choice district, but to remain in Minneapolis, either enrolling in a Minneapolis choice school or another public school
5. Suburban choice, non-participant = ineligible students who attend suburban choice school
6. Minneapolis choice, non-participant = ineligible students who attend Minneapolis choice magnet school

This report is organized around the five major topics and sixteen guiding evaluation questions as follows:

² See Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers for further discussion of factors affecting data availability.

- **Section 1: Program Participation** describes the eligibility requirements for students and schools participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program, summarizes key characteristics of suburban and Minneapolis receiving schools, compares participants to non-participants on key characteristics, provides data on the enrollment patterns of students enrolling in the suburban choice schools during the first two years of the program, and describes the system of transportation in place to support the program. This section addresses Questions 1 and 2.
- **Section 2: Parents' Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction** presents findings from telephone interviews conducted with parents of children who were eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program to find out how they selected a school for their child and their satisfaction with their choice of schools. Parents were also asked about other ways they were involved in their child's education. This section addresses Questions 3-7.
- **Section 3: School Responsiveness** summarizes data gathered to assess the responsiveness of *The Choice Is Yours* schools in meeting the needs of students participating in the program. It includes information gathered from program staff, district representatives, parents, and teachers on how students were recruited and welcomed, perceptions of racial climate in the schools, and how well these schools are meeting the needs of diverse student populations. This section addresses Questions 8-14.
- **Section 4: Impact on Students** examines data on the effects of participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program on students' academic achievement and school attendance. It also raises issues related to the examination of discipline data as a means of assessing program effectiveness. This section addresses Question 15.
- **Section 5: Student Experiences** presents in-depth information about the experiences of students enrolled in suburban choice schools gathered through focus groups that were conducted with secondary students attending these schools during the 2002-03 school year. The findings are presented in terms of the themes emerging across secondary schools that enroll *The Choice Is Yours* students. This section addresses Question 16.
- **Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Considerations** outlines in more detail the evaluation design and presents data on response rates, respondent characteristics, and the generalizability of the data.
- **Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers** discusses some of the more salient barriers to program implementation and evaluation encountered during the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Figure E1. Evaluation Topics and Guiding Questions

Program Participation

1. How do program participants compare to non-participants in the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS)?
2. Are parents receiving their desired choices, enrolling in their choice schools, and are they staying in their choice schools or returning to MPS?

Data Sources: Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS); program enrollment and participation records

Parent Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction

3. Why are parents participating or not participating in the inter-district transfer program?
4. What types of information inform parents' decisions about the inter-district transfer program?
5. What schools and programs are most attractive to parents and why?
6. What effect does participation in the inter-district transfer program have on the types and levels of parent involvement and home-school communication?
7. How satisfied are inter-district transfer program parents with their current choice?
8. How do schools recruit and welcome inter-district transfer program participants?
9. What are inter-district transfer program parent perceptions of the racial climate in the schools and how does this compare to other parent perceptions?
10. According to parents, in what ways are schools addressing the needs of diverse students?

Data sources: 260 telephone interviews with parents of inter-district (suburban choice) and intra-district (Minneapolis choice magnet) students; 270 telephone interview with parents on non-participating students, including parents of eligible but non-participating students; and 155 surveys from parents of students already attending suburban choice schools

School Responsiveness

11. How have suburban schools and magnet-receiving schools recruited and welcomed students participating in the inter-district transfer program?
12. What are the levels and types of home-school-community activities with which families participating in the inter-district transfer program may be involved?
13. What is the racial climate in the suburban and magnet schools?
14. What types of programs have schools implemented to address diversity?

Data sources: 380 school climate surveys completed by teachers at suburban choice schools; 123 school climate surveys completed by teachers at Minneapolis choice magnet schools; Interviews with WMEP Steering Committee members and the CIY Family Liaison; and District desegregation plans

Academic Achievement, Attendance, and Discipline

15. What effect does participation in the program have on academic achievement, attendance, and discipline when compared with a comparable group of MPS students?

Data sources: 3rd and 5th Grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments; 8th Grade Basic Skills Test

Student Experiences

16. How do students in the inter-district transfer program interpret their school experiences?

Data source: 25 focus groups with 109 inter-district transfer students from 20 middle, junior high, and high schools

Where applicable, the evaluation includes comparisons of program participants to non-participants or other comparable groups. (For a more detailed description of the evaluation methods, including technical considerations, see Appendix A.)

Key Findings

This summary is organized around the five major topics – program participation; parents’ reasons for choice, involvement, and satisfaction; school responsiveness; and student experiences – and the sixteen questions that guided the evaluation. Many of the guiding questions relate only to the inter-district (suburban choice) portion of the program, which was the focus of this evaluation. Additional data on the intra-district (Minneapolis choice) option, if not summarized here, may be available in the full report. A brief summary of key findings for each of the guiding questions is presented below. Relevant page numbers where these and other results may be found in the report are also provided.

Program Participation

Question 1: How do program participants compare to non-participants in the Minneapolis Public Schools?

All students who live in the city of Minneapolis and are eligible for free or reduced price lunches are eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program through the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) or intra-district transfer (Minneapolis choice magnet) options. This amounts to approximately 68% of all students attending Minneapolis public schools each year, or roughly 31,000 of the 45,000 publicly enrolled students during the 2000-01 school year (the year prior to the start of *The Choice Is Yours* program during which students began submitting applications for the following 2001-2002 school year).

Suburban Choice. Approximately 1 out of every 4 students enrolling in the suburban choice program was white; 1 out of 2 students was black. Of the roughly 30,000 eligible students remaining in a Minneapolis school, 1 out of 10 was white and 1 out of 2 was black. Relatively few suburban choice participants were categorized as limited English proficiency (12%), compared to one-third of eligible students who remained in Minneapolis. About 15% of participants and non-participants receive special education services. Students of each gender were also equally represented in both groups. An examination of student enrollment by grade level indicates that about 30% of suburban choice students enrolled at grades 1-5 compared to roughly 40% in the group of non-participants (see pages 13-14).

Minneapolis Choice. Accurate data regarding the characteristics of students enrolling in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools through *The Choice Is Yours* program was unavailable due to insufficient data systems (see Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Notes and Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers).

Question 2: Are parents receiving their desired choices, enrolling in their choice schools, and are they staying in their choice schools or returning to the Minneapolis Public Schools?

Suburban Choice. All students applying to suburban choice school districts received one of their *districts* of choice. No data were available on whether these students also received their

school of choice within a district. A total of 1079 students were enrolled in a suburban choice school through *The Choice Is Yours* program at some point during the first two years of the program, with 546 enrolling during the first year and 533 during the second. Of these, 62% continued in the program for at least one year, while 11% returned to a Minneapolis Public School, and another 27% went elsewhere (see pages 14-18).

A review of data on open enrollment *applications* shows that during the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program, the total number of open enrollment applications increased by 688 to 2155 total applications (up from 1467 applications during the two years just prior to the program). At the same time, a total of 1079 applications for open enrollment were received under *The Choice Is Yours* program, suggesting that some of the students who were previously applying under the general open enrollment program were now applying under *The Choice Is Yours* program. Thus, during the first two years of the program, *The Choice Is Yours* students represented half of all open enrollment applications.

In further examining this data by race, it is also evident that more students of color, particularly black students, are applying for open enrollment through *The Choice Is Yours* program. Before *The Choice Is Yours* program was instituted, black students made up 29% of all open enrollment applications; this percentage increased to 44% by the end of the program's second year (see pages 18).

Minneapolis Choice. Records available for the first year of the program indicate that 85% of the 118 students eligible to receive priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program and requesting placement into Kindergarten at a one of the Minneapolis choice magnet schools received their first choice when the request was submitted by the January 15 deadline. Similarly, 80% of the 60 eligible students requesting placement into grades 1-5 at one of the Minneapolis choice magnet schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program received their first choice.

When *all* priority placements are taken into account, the data show that 90% of 268 students who met *The Choice Is Yours* eligibility requirements and requested placement into Kindergarten at a Minneapolis choice magnet school received their first choice. Likewise, 88% of 106 students meeting program eligibility requirements and requesting placement into grades 1-5 at these schools received their first choice when *all* priority placements are taken into account.

What these data indicate is that many of the Kindergarten and grades 1-5 students who were eligible to receive priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program were actually getting into the Minneapolis choice magnet schools under other priority placements, such as sibling or English language learner (ELL) preference. These data also indicate that a greater number of eligible students are being placed into Minneapolis choice magnet schools on the basis of the priority placement criteria outlined by *The Choice Is Yours* program than would otherwise be placed under existing priority placements in the Minneapolis school district. Data on the placement of students in Minneapolis choice magnet schools was not available for second year of the program (see pages 14-16).

Parent Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction

Question 3: Why are parents participating or not participating in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program?

Parents who had a child participating in suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* said they saw the program as an opportunity to provide higher quality academic opportunities for their child. Parents' decision to not enroll their child in the program, however, may have been affected in part by poor name recognition. When parents were asked if they had "heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program" 89% of non-participating parents and 80% of Minneapolis choice parents responded that they had not heard of the program when asked about it by name. In following up with non-participating parents to ask why they chose *not* to have their child participate in the program, the few that had heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program cited lack of knowledge about the program, learning about it after their child was already enrolled in another school, the distance of the schools from home, satisfaction with their current school, and a desire to minimize the number of transitions the child and/or family was currently experiencing (see pages 29-34).

Question 4: What types of information inform parents' decisions about the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program?

Parents learned about the suburban choice program primarily through someone they knew, their child's former school or district, and materials about the program that were either mailed home to them or that they picked up at another location. Other ways parents heard about the program included television and newspapers, and a variety of community organizations. Parents' decision to enroll their child in the suburban choice program were most influenced by the recommendation of a friend, relative, or neighbor and visits to their child's school (see pages 31-34).

Question 5: What schools and programs are most attractive to parents and why?

Parents of participating and non-participating students all cited academic quality as what they desired most in a school, noting teacher quality, a reputation for high standards and high achievement, and a variety of curriculum offerings as key elements of such quality. Parents were also looking for a safe learning environment where a sense of community is fostered among staff and students. When it came down to choosing one school over another, a convenient location – close to home, work, or daycare – was also important to parents (see pages 34-37).

Question 6: What effect does participation in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program have on the types and levels of parent involvement and home-school communication?

Most suburban choice parents felt their child's school encouraged parent participation and said that it would be easy for them to become involved if they wanted to. While most suburban choice parents had gone to their child's school for parent-teacher conferences,

informal talks with a teacher or principal, or just to visit their child's classroom, the vast majority also said they would like to be more involved if time constraints could be overcome. When asked how their level of involvement with their child's current school compared to their involvement at the previous school, about one third of suburban choice parents said they were more involved, one-third were less involved, and the other third said their level of involvement had remained the same. The nature and level of parent involvement for participants and non-participants was essentially the same (see pages 46-50).

With regard to home-school-communication, 43% of suburban choice parents said they had *more* contact with their child's current school as compared to the previous school; 23% had less contact. Suburban choice parents characterized about 60% of all home-school contacts as relating to their child's academic performance, compared to 40 to 50% of such contact for students who remained in a Minneapolis public school (see pages 50-52).

Question 7: How satisfied are inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program parents with their current choice?

Suburban choice parents were satisfied with the opportunities for parent involvement at their child's current school and the ways and frequency with which the school communicated with them (see pages 42 and 44). When asked if they would choose this school again for this child, 83% of suburban choice parents said they would. Most parents of students enrolling in a suburban choice school through *The Choice Is Yours* program also said they would recommend the school (88%) to others, compared to 76% of parents of non-Minneapolis residents attending the suburban choice schools (that is, other suburban students attending the school). Almost all parents of *The Choice Is Yours* students attending suburban choice schools said they would recommend the program (99%) to other parents. Many of these parents had already recommended the school and the program to other families (see pages 53-58).

School Responsiveness

Question 8: How do schools recruit and welcome inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program participants? (parent perspective)
AND

Question 11: How have suburban schools and magnet-receiving schools recruited and welcomed students participating in the inter-district transfer program?

Suburban Choice. Suburban districts tended to emphasize "outreach" rather than "active recruitment" of students (see Appendix B) through dissemination of informational materials, meeting with prospective parents at informational meetings out in the community, and the role of designated personnel within their districts who arranged school visits for prospective parents and provided other types of support for *The Choice Is Yours* program and families. State-sponsored outreach included community partnerships, media coverage, and special support services for prospective and participating families (see pages 59-64).

The suburban schools welcomed suburban choice students as they did all new families: with new student orientations, open houses, and increased follow-up from school staff. When

necessary, suburban schools made a special effort to reduce barriers to participation for *The Choice Is Yours* students, particularly when it came to arranging transportation or providing a little extra encouragement or assistance for students adjusting to a new way of doing things. Both parents and students felt welcome at the suburban schools, saying that the staff clearly cared about them and offering assistance if needed (see pages 73-74).

Minneapolis Choice. During the first two years of the program, students were not actively recruited by the Minneapolis Public School district to enroll in a Minneapolis choice magnet school under the intra-district portion of *The Choice Is Yours*. (Outreach on the part of the state, however, did include this intra-district transfer option as one of the school choice options available to parents.) Instead, all student applications to the Minneapolis choice schools were reviewed by the student placement office on the basis of their eligibility for priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program and placed accordingly. Students enrolling in a Minneapolis choice magnet school under *The Choice Is Yours* program were not treated any differently from other students attending these schools (see page 8).

Question 12: What are the levels and types of home-school-community activities with which families participating in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program may be involved?

Families participating in the suburban choice component of *The Choice Is Yours* program were eligible to participate in any and all activities and events open to any student enrolled in the school or district (see page 73). As needed, schools would act to reduce barriers to participation.

Question 9: What are inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program parent perceptions of the racial climate in the schools and how does this compare to other parent perceptions?

AND

Question 13: What is the racial climate in the suburban and magnet schools?

Suburban Choice. Parents of students attending suburban choice schools through *The Choice Is Yours* program gave their schools passing marks in citing the presence of a school culture and climate that was supportive of student learning. Parents whose child had enrolled through the program tended to give somewhat higher ratings than parents of students already attending the school, although both groups gave generally positive ratings.

Suburban teachers also tended to give positive ratings to their schools on items related to the general school climate. When asked to rate additional items regarding school culture and climate as it relates more specifically to issues of diversity, the responses of teachers suggest that the learning environments in the suburban choice schools are less integrated when considering the nature students' interracial interactions and the lack of diversity among staff and people in leadership roles (see pages 64-73).

Minneapolis Choice. Parents of students attending Minneapolis choice schools through *The Choice Is Yours* program also gave their schools passing marks, characterizing their school's

culture and climate as supporting student learning. Parents of students attending these schools, but not through the program, gave equally positive ratings as did the teachers in these Minneapolis choice schools (see pages 64-73).

When asked to rate additional items regarding their school's culture and climate as it relates to issues of diversity, teachers' responses characterized the Minneapolis choice schools as offering a more integrated learning environment where students of different races and cultures interact well with one another. The lack of diversity among staff and people in leadership roles in the Minneapolis choice schools was also highlighted by these teachers (see pages 64-73).

Question 10: According to parents, in what ways are schools addressing the needs of diverse students? AND

Question 14: What types of programs have schools implemented to address diversity?

Roughly 2 out of 3 parents of suburban choice students felt that their schools were prepared to meet the needs of racially and economically diverse students; parents of Minneapolis choice and non-participating students were even more likely believe their schools were prepared to work with these student populations. Parents in both settings cited the lack of racial and economic discrimination, the celebration of diversity, and the financial support available through their schools as evidence of the ways in which their schools were prepared to meet students' needs. Parents in both groups were much less likely to characterize their child's current school as prepared to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students (42% of suburban choice parents, 67% of Minneapolis choice, and 68% non-participating parents), citing the presence or absence of bilingual staff and/or interpreters as supporting evidence. Teachers agree with parents on school preparedness with the exception that they also felt their schools were prepared to work with the challenges presented by increasing language diversity.

Finally, as part of the West Metro Education Program's desegregation plan, the eight suburban school districts participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program and the Minneapolis Public Schools are actively engaged in ongoing efforts to support their schools and communities in addressing issues of diversity through staff development; modifying curriculum and instruction; reviewing and revising policies; offering additional learning opportunities for students, families, and the community; providing transportation and other support services; and generally engaging in outreach (see pages 73-83).

Impact on Students

Question 15: What effect does participation in the program have on academic achievement, attendance, and discipline when compared with comparison groups of MPS students?

The analysis of data related to student outcomes was only conducted for students for whom accurate enrollment data were available. During the first two years of the program, this data was only available for students enrolled in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) portion

of *The Choice Is Yours* program (see Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Notes and Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers). Consequently, the outcome analyses compared suburban choice students to the eligible students who chose not to enroll in a suburban district but to remain in Minneapolis, either enrolling in a Minneapolis choice magnet school or another public school.

Achievement. Lacking data regarding students' level of achievement prior to entering *The Choice Is Yours* program (i.e., whether students who chose to attend choice schools were performing at, above, or below other eligible students), the findings from the current analysis of state assessment data while interesting were not sufficient to determine the extent to which these differences are a result of participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program (see pages 84-88 and Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Notes and Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers).

Initial plans to conduct a cross-district analysis of changes in student performance for participants and non-participants using standardized achievement data from participating school districts had to be set aside until the relationships among some of the key stakeholders in *The Choice Is Yours* program could support the level of cross-district collaboration required to plan and conduct this analysis. Such an analysis is planned for next year, when five school districts will compare the achievement of participants to non-participants in an analysis of data from the Northwest Achievement Level Tests (see pages 93-97). These analyses will examine student achievement data from the first three years of *The Choice Is Yours* program and will include an analysis of key factors known to influence student achievement (e.g., prior achievement, attendance, mobility, socioeconomic status and other student demographics).

Attendance. No significant differences were noted between suburban choice participants and eligible, non-suburban participants in terms of attendance rates. However, a comparison of participant's overall attendance rate (i.e., the rate across all enrollments) to the rate while enrolled in a suburban choice school suggests higher levels of absenteeism during the time in which high school students are enrolled in the suburban schools. This trend was also noted for girls and students with limited English proficiency while enrolled in suburban choice schools (see pages 89-91).

Discipline. Finally, a review of official sources of student discipline data at the state and local levels identified several threats to the validity and reliability of this data. Consequently, no analysis of student behavior was conducted. In a related source of data, parents felt that the rules and expectations for student behavior at their schools were clear, enforced, and administered fairly. Teachers in suburban schools, however, did not feel such rules were enforced; teachers at Minneapolis choice schools felt they were not administered fairly (see page 92).

Student Experiences

Question 16: How do students in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program interpret their school experiences?

Focus groups were conducted with students attending middle, junior high, and high schools in suburban choice districts. For the most part, students characterized their experiences in these schools as being more positive than negative. Half of the students characterized their transition to the suburban school as easy, 28% as difficult. Still, the vast majority of *The Choice Is Yours* students attending suburban choice schools felt welcomed by students, teachers and administrators at the beginning of the school year. Most students did not feel they had been treated any differently, noting that few people even knew they lived outside of the school district. Some students commented, however, that teachers and other students seemed to hold stereotypes about people who live in Minneapolis. It was the presence of such attitudes and beliefs in their schools and not necessarily any overt behaviors that *The Choice Is Yours* students liked least about their schools. In a few schools, however, some students believed they had been treated differently by teachers as a result of these stereotypes. Generally, the suburban choice students expressed satisfaction with their school experiences with most enjoying friendships at their new school (see pages 93-110).

Is *The Choice Is Yours* Achieving Its Goals?

This evaluation was designed to assess whether *The Choice Is Yours* program enhanced educational opportunities for Minneapolis students and whether participation in the program improved students' achievement. As noted above, the available student achievement data were insufficient to determine the effects of participation on students' academic performance. Data were available, however, to support some conclusions regarding the extent to which educational opportunities were enhanced.

Evidence of Enhanced School Choice

- 1079 students received *priority placement into suburban choice school districts* through open enrollment under *The Choice Is Yours* program. In addition, each of these students was able to enroll in one of their districts of choice. All suburban choice students also received free transportation to their suburban school district.
- A greater number of students are being placed into *Minneapolis choice magnet schools* (both in Kindergarten and grades 1-5) on the basis of the priority placement criteria outlined by *The Choice Is Yours* program than would otherwise be placed under other priority placements in the Minneapolis school district.
- Data on *open enrollment applications* during the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program indicate an increase in the overall number of applications that may be attributed, in part, to an increase in new applications by students applying through the program.

- Other data on *open enrollment applications* suggests that some of the students who were previously applying under the general open enrollment program were now applying under *The Choice Is Yours* program. During the first two years of the program, students enrolling under *The Choice Is Yours* represented half of all open enrollment applications.
- *Open enrollment data* also indicate that more black students are applying for open enrollment through *The Choice Is Yours* program.

What Works and What Doesn't in the Inter-District Transfer Program?

Some strengths and weaknesses of *The Choice Is Yours* Program with regard to alleviating concentrations of poverty and racial segregation in the Minneapolis school district may be identified from the evaluation data. The evaluator recommends that the program partners engage in a formal process of reviewing of the evaluation data to identify the program characteristics that stand out in this regard. Some examples of strengths to consider include:

- Effectively transporting students from Minneapolis to 60 different schools across eight suburban school districts, twice a day.
- Coordination of activities through the representative leadership of three planning groups that provide regular feedback and discussion among all of the key stakeholders (e.g., *The Choice Is Yours* Leadership Team, *The Choice Is Yours* Applications and Enrollment Group, and the WMEP Steering Committee)
- Specific outreach strategies that support parents in exercising their right to choose from all of their available school choices. In particular, school visits that come about as a result of initial contact with parents through community events and informational meetings, and the dissemination of accurate information through a variety of means to increase awareness in the community such that parents can continue to rely on the recommendations of trusted friends, family, school staff and community members.

Some examples of potential weaknesses include:

- turnover of key representatives among the project partners,
- perceptions of competition for students when engaging in outreach efforts to support school choice,
- poor name recognition for *The Choice Is Yours* program, and
- inadequate data systems for tracking data on students attending Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

Future evaluations of this and related programs would benefit from a formal “process evaluation” to monitor the extent to which planned activities were implemented as intended, to document barriers encountered along the way and subsequent changes made in key aspects of the program, and to engage key stakeholders in a systematic process of reflecting upon the implementation process to identify effective program features.

Section 1:

Program Participation

This section describes the eligibility requirements for student and school participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program, summarizes key characteristics of suburban and Minneapolis receiving schools, and compares participants to non-participants on key characteristics. In addition, this section presents data on the enrollment patterns of students enrolling in the suburban choice schools during the first two years of the program and describes the system of transportation in place to support the program.

Evaluation Topics and Guiding Questions: Program Participation

1. How do program participants compare to non-participants in the Minneapolis Public Schools?
2. Are parents receiving their desired choices, enrolling in their choice schools, and are they staying in their choice schools or returning to the Minneapolis Public Schools?

Data Sources: Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS); program enrollment and participation records

Eligibility and Key Characteristics

Suburban Choice Schools

The Choice Is Yours inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program offers priority placement under open enrollment and free transportation to selected suburban schools for students who live in the city of Minneapolis and qualify for free or reduced priced lunches. For priority consideration, eligible students must apply for the inter-district transfer program by completing a State of Minnesota open-enrollment form by the January 15th deadline.

Under the suburban choice program, eligible students receive priority placement in selected suburban school districts on the basis of whether they reside in north or south Minneapolis (see Figure 1.1 below).³ Students who live on the north side of Minneapolis may attend schools in Columbia Heights, Hopkins, Robbinsdale, St. Anthony/New Brighton, St. Louis Park, and Wayzata. Students who live on the south side of Minneapolis may apply for enrollment in the Edina, Hopkins, Richfield, and St. Louis Park school districts. Students who are already attending school in one of the suburban school districts under open enrollment may continue their enrollment under *The Choice Is Yours* program whether or not they reside in the corresponding location within Minneapolis. When there are more applicants than spaces available – which did not occur during the first two years of the program – students from the priority attendance zones designated in the Minneapolis intra-district plan receive the highest priority under *The Choice Is Yours* program (see outline of priority attendance areas in Figure 1.2, page 9).

³ Interstate 94/394 represents the north/south boundary through Minneapolis.

[INSERT FIGURE 1.1 – MAP OF PARTICIPATING SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS]
STORED IN DESKTOP BINDER

Sixty-five schools across the eight participating suburban school districts were identified under the settlement as receiving schools for *The Choice Is Yours* students (see Table 1.1 on the following pages). Of these, 42 were elementary schools, 14 are middle or junior high schools, and 9 are high schools. Each year, a minimum of 500 *new* spaces are to be made available in the suburban districts for a total of 2000 students over four years.⁴ Spaces were allotted within each district relative to the district's total student enrollment:

<u>District</u>	<u>Number of spaces</u>
Columbia Heights	26
Edina	70
Hopkins	85
Richfield	42
Robbinsdale	127
St. Anthony/New Brighton	15
St. Louis Park	43
Wayzata	92

Overall, the suburban schools have relatively few students of color with only 8 of the 60 schools having more than 35% student of color (see Table 1.1 on the following pages). Under the settlement, schools were excluded from the initial selection process if the percentage of students eligible to receive free and reduced price lunches exceeded 50%.⁵ Similarly, only 8 schools have more than 35% of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches; for the most part, these are the same schools. As Table 1.1 indicates over time these suburban school districts are growing more racially and economically diverse.

Later discussions of how parents and students choose schools, a review of actual enrollment patterns, and information on transportation to the suburban choice districts all indicate that the location of these districts plays an important role in the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours* program. As shown earlier in Figure 1.1, the majority of schools in two of the districts – Wayzata and Hopkins – are located further away from Minneapolis while students enrolling in districts adjacent to the city, in some cases, are able to walk across the street to attend school in another district.

⁴ The settlement required that the program be in place for four years, beginning in 2001-02 and ending with the 2004-05 school year.

⁵ At one school, New Hope Elementary in Robbinsdale, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches has increased above 50% over the course of the program.

Table 1.1. Characteristics of suburban choice receiving schools by year.

		2001-02			2002-03		
	Grades Served	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority
Columbia Heights							
Highland Elementary	K-5	413	45.0	33.9	389	47.8	41.7
North Park Elementary	K-5	527	43.5	26.2	479	41.3	29.7
Valley View Elementary	K-5	443	45.8	28.9	464	49.6	35.8
Central Middle School	6-8	745	43.5	30.5	726	47.9	32.9
Columbia Heights High School	9-12	924	30.3	25.1	936	32.6	30.1
Edina							
Concord Elementary	K-5	616	4.6	6.3	613	4.1	5.7
Cornelia Elementary	K-5	465	8.6	17.2	485	9.7	18.8
Countryside Elementary	K-5	487	4.1	6.8	505	5.5	6.7
Creek Valley Elementary	K-5	564	4.6	11.0	539	5.4	11.0
Highlands Elementary	K-5	502	2.0	5.2	524	1.5	6.1
Normandale Elementary	K-5	572	2.3	5.8	581	1.7	6.5
South View Middle School	6-9	974	6.5	9.2	1042	6.3	10.8
Valley View Middle School	6-9	1168	3.7	6.0	1175	4.3	7.7
Edina High School	10-12	1547	2.9	6.7	1569	4.0	8.5

Source: Minnesota Department of Education web site

Table 1.1. Characteristics of suburban choice receiving schools by year (continued).

		2001-02			2002-03		
	Grades Served	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority
Hopkins							
Alice Smith Elementary	K-6	521	18.8	18.0	519	19.3	20.4
Eisenhower Elementary	K-6	751	24.2	23.6	716	27.5	27.0
Gatewood Elementary	K-6	625	13.1	13.4	633	15.2	12.6
Glen Lake Elementary	K-6	537	1.7	3.0	532	2.8	2.3
Katherine Curren Elementary	K-6	384	34.6	27.3	373	34.9	32.2
L.H. Tanglen Elementary	K-6	732	13.5	15.9	720	16.1	17.5
Meadowbrook Elementary	K-6	526	4.6	11.6	533	4.9	12.4
North Junior High School	7-9	1004	13.4	19.1	1000	13.8	19.8
West Junior High School	7-9	924	10.9	11.5	943	10.6	11.6
Hopkins High School	10-12	1982	9.7	15.0	1996	9.9	16.7
Richfield							
Sheridan Hills Elementary	K-2	423	22.7	32.6	410	34.6	38.1
Centennial Elementary	K-2	509	35.6	47.9	461	41.9	53.4
Richfield Intermediate Elementary	3-5	883	36.0	42.0	826	41.2	44.8
Richfield Middle School	6-8	980	29.3	36.7	1007	35.8	42.3
Richfield High School	9-12	1388	23.9	35.0	1389	27.9	35.5

Source: Minnesota Department of Education web site

Table 1.1. Characteristics of suburban choice receiving schools by year (continued).

		2001-02			2002-03		
	Grades Served	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority
Robbinsdale							
Forest Elementary	K-5	450	30.2	26.2	414	29.2	29.5
Lakeview Elementary	K-5	396	30.8	28.0	389	29.1	31.9
Neill Elementary	K-5	528	24.6	22.5	552	29.2	27.5
New Hope Elementary	K-5	408	51.2	46.6	408	55.4	52.5
Noble Elementary	K-5	444	28.2	27.3	461	25.2	30.4
Pilgrim Lane Elementary	K-5	495	18.2	23.4	481	22.5	24.3
RSI Elementary	K-5	633	9.0	18.6	632	8.5	19.8
Sonnesyn Elementary	K-5	544	22.6	21.3	533	22.7	25.9
Sunny Hollow Elementary	K-5	490	24.3	24.3	484	27.9	28.5
Zachary Lane Elementary	K-5	445	2.5	10.3	466	4.1	13.1
Plymouth Middle School	6-8	1290	26.1	26.1	1217	28.4	28.5
Sandburg Middle School	6-8	1356	31.9	34.3	1368	33.2	34.7
Technology & Lang. Campus	6-8	627	17.1	14.0	620	15.5	15.5
Armstrong High School	9-12	2245	13.1	17.5	2236	13.3	18.8
Cooper High School	9-12	2054	24.5	30.0	2077	24.0	30.2
St. Anthony—New Brighton							
Wilshire Park Elementary	K-5	596	11.8	18.8	603	11.2	19.9
St. Anthony Middle School	6-8	379	9.8	14.5	390	11.3	14.1
St. Anthony Village Sr. High	9-12	524	5.2	12.0	535	6.2	11.8

Source: Minnesota Department of Education web site

Table 1.1. Characteristics of suburban choice receiving schools by year (continued).

		2001-02			2002-03		
	Grades Served	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority	Enrollment	%F/R lunch	% minority
St. Louis Park							
Aquila Elementary	K-3	398	30.2	26.9	396	36.4	32.6
Cedar Manor Elementary	3-6	466	35.0	31.6	443	35.0	33.9
Park Spanish Immersion Elem.	K-6	407	3.4	20.6	491	5.9	22.0
Peter Hobart Elementary	K-3	495	16.2	13.9	487	19.1	17.9
Susan Lindgren Elementary	4-6	448	16.7	19.4	424	19.8	17.2
St. Louis Park Junior High	7-8	689	20.3	19.9	648	23.3	22.4
St. Louis Park High School	9-12	1285	14.7	17.4	1256	17.5	19.7
Wayzata							
Birchview Elementary	K-5	536	11.2	13.8	531	13.9	13.8
Gleason Lake Elementary	K-5	747	3.4	5.5	770	6.5	7.9
Greenwood Elementary	K-5	669	1.9	6.9	644	2.2	7.1
Kimberly Lane Elementary	K-5	692	0.6	10.6	741	0.8	11.5
Oakwood Elementary	K-5	519	21.6	19.7	475	21.5	21.7
Plymouth Creek Elementary	K-5	632	4.4	8.4	610	5.9	8.5
Sunset Hill Elementary	K-5	500	13.0	9.8	513	17.0	11.1
Central Middle School	6-8	824	8.6	15.2	843	9.5	14.4
East Middle School	6-8	734	7.0	11.7	732	12.8	13.7
West Middle School	6-8	698	3.2	5.6	704	6.1	4.8
Wayzata High School	9-12	2890	4.7	10.2	2971	7.1	10.9

Source: Minnesota Department of Education web site

Minneapolis Choice Magnet Schools

In addition to the enhanced open enrollment options in neighboring suburban school districts, eligible students may receive priority placement into selected Minneapolis elementary magnet schools through the intra-district transfer (Minneapolis choice) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Qualifying Minneapolis choice magnet schools are required to offer a percentage of their spaces to students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch and living within the city of Minneapolis. If spaces are limited, as they were during the second year of the program, students who meet the first criteria of eligibility for free or reduced price lunches *and* the second criteria of living within a Minneapolis Public Schools attendance area with 90% students of color will receive the highest priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program (see outline of priority attendance areas in Figure 1.2 on next page). Priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* followed district priorities, such as sibling and employee preference, and any specialized English language learner (ELL) or special education programs offered in the building.

To apply for priority placement into one of the Minneapolis choice magnet schools serving grades K-8, students were required to complete a Minneapolis school request form. During the first two years of the program, few students applying to attend one of the Minneapolis choice schools knew they were eligible to attend under *The Choice Is Yours* program. Rather, when eligible students requested a Minneapolis choice school, they were simply assigned to the school when space was available.

Each year, Minneapolis magnet schools may qualify to be a receiving school under *The Choice Is Yours* (or lose their status as a receiving school) if the school's percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch is less than or equal to the district average (e.g., 68%). During the first year of the program (2001-02), thirteen magnet schools met the selection criteria. The next year, the number of receiving schools dropped to ten as a result of two school closings, three schools no longer meeting the selection criteria, and one school becoming qualified (see Table 1.2). During the first two years of the program, only one of the Minneapolis choice magnet school had less than 35% students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. All of the participating schools enrolled more than 40% students of color.

Figure 1.2

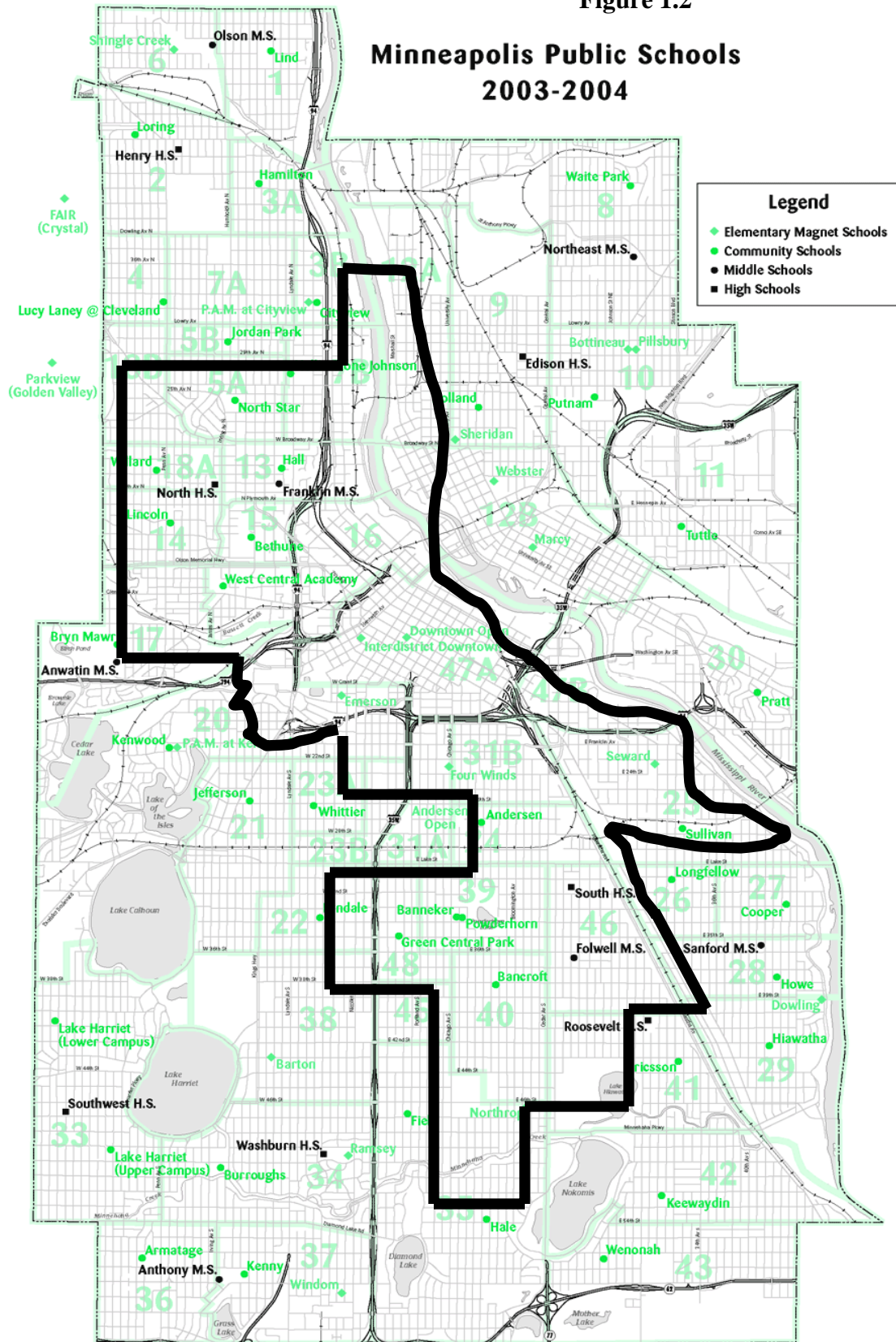


Table 1.2. Characteristics of Minneapolis choice magnet schools by year.

		2001-02			2002-03		
	Grades Served	Enrollment	% F/R lunch	% minority	Enrollment	% F/R lunch	% minority
Armatage Montessori	PK-5	-- ³	--	--	421	35.4	43.9
Barton	K-8	588	16.5	47.6	612	20.4	47.2
Brookside	K-5	235	68.5	80.0	<i>closed</i>	--	--
Dowling	K-5	363	42.7	48.2	390	38.5	43.3
Downtown Open	K-5	151	72.2	80.8	-- ³	--	--
Emerson	K-8	488	58.0	74.0	500	58.6	77.4
Marcy	K-8	595	44.9	47.6	598	44.3	47.4
Mill City	K-5	141	47.5	70.9	<i>closed</i>	--	--
Northrop	K-5	228	62.3	68.4	242	59.9	71.1
Pillsbury ¹	PK-5	610	64.8	63.4	470	65.6	64.5
PAM @ Kenwood ²	K-2	-- ³	--	--	98	53.1	59.2
Ramsey	K-8	894	53.8	68.1	916	55.0	69.0
Seward	PK-8	664	39.8	51.2	681	38.7	50.5
Sheridan	K-8	720	72.8	72.2	-- ³	--	--
Windom	K-8	422	67.8	73.7	-- ³	--	--

Notes:

¹Pillsbury Math, Science, and Technology²Performing Arts Magnet @ Kenwood³School did not meet program eligibility requirements this year.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education web site

According to the settlement, the receiving school must reserve a percentage of the *available* spaces for *The Choice Is Yours* students based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Consequently, the total number of available spaces at a participating school could fluctuate from year to year if the school's free/reduced price lunch status changes (e.g., going from greater than 50% to below or equal to 50%), if more and more students enroll under the program, and/or if the balance of students remaining at and leaving the school changes. If student mobility at a school is high, then the constant turnover of students could keep spaces open for *The Choice Is Yours* students. As discussed later on in this report, parent reports of how long students have been enrolled in these magnet schools suggests that mobility rates may be lower in these schools. These data should be verified with office district mobility records.

If the percentage of free and reduced price lunch students in a Minneapolis choice magnet school was greater than 50%, then 10% of the available Kindergarten spaces and 50% of spaces available in grades 1-5 must be held for *The Choice Is Yours* students through the January 15 deadline. If the percentage of free and reduced price lunch students in a Minneapolis choice magnet was less than or equal to 50%, then 20% of the available Kindergarten spaces and 50% of spaces available in grades 1-5 must be held for students enrolling through the program. In the first year of the program, a total of 446 spaces in grades K-5 were set aside in Minneapolis choice magnet schools; 105 of these were set aside for

Kindergartners and 341 for students applying in grades 1-5 (see Table 1.3). Similar data for 2002-03 were not available.⁶

Table 1.3. Allocation of spaces to *The Choice Is Yours* students in Minneapolis choice magnet schools during the first year of the program.

Schools	Spaces Available 2001-2002	
	# of Kindergarten spaces at 10%	# of Grade 1-5 spaces at 50%
Free/reduced lunch > 50%		
Brookside	4	27
Downtown Open	3	17
Emerson	6	0
Pillsbury	7	41
Ramsey	7	56
Sheridan	6	90
Windom	4	33
Free/reduced lunch <= 50%		
Barton	14	0
Dowling	12	30
Marcy	12	18
Mill City	6	13
Northrop	8	16
Seward	16	0

Source: Minneapolis Student Placement Office, 2001-02.

Characteristics of Participating Communities

One further note may be helpful to enlighten the reader about the characteristics of the communities within which *The Choice Is Yours* is currently being implemented. Table 1.4 provides an overview of the racial, educational, and economic status of residents for the major city in each of the participating school districts. While the city of Minneapolis is clearly the most racially diverse (35% people of color), it also has the greatest percentage of families living in poverty (12%) and the greatest percentage of non-English speaking households (19%). In contrast, residents in the cities of Edina and Wayzata are the most likely to be college-educated and to have higher household incomes. In addition to Minneapolis, the percentage of non-English speaking households is above 10 percent in four of the cities – Columbia Heights, Hopkins, Richfield, and St. Louis Park.

⁶ See Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers for a further discussion of factors affecting data availability.

Table 1.4. Demographic profiles of major cities within *The Choice Is Yours* program region.

	Race / Ethnicity				Education	Income	
	White	Black	Hispanic or Latino ¹	Speak a language other than English at home	Bachelor's degree or higher ²	Median Household Income	Families below poverty level
United States	75.1%	12.3%	12.5%	17.9%	24.4%	\$41,994	9.2%
State of Minnesota	89.4	3.5	2.9	8.5	27.4	\$47,111	5.1
Cities in Minnesota							
Minneapolis	65.1	18.0	7.6	19.3	37.4	\$37,974	11.9
Columbia Heights	87.4	3.6	3.1	11.5	17.6	\$40,562	3.9
Edina	94.3	1.2	1.1	8.1	58.5	\$66,019	2.0
Hopkins	82.6	5.2	5.5	15.9	35.0	\$39,203	8.1
Richfield	81.2	6.6	6.3	13.5	27.3	\$45,519	3.9
Robbinsdale	88.9	5.7	2.0	6.5	27.3	\$48,271	2.0
St. Anthony	90.6	2.1	1.6	9.5	34.4	\$46,883	2.8
New Brighton	88.6	3.3	1.8	9.1	40.6	\$52,856	3.3
St. Louis Park	88.9	4.4	2.9	10.2	43.2	\$49,260	3.0
Wayzata	96.1	0.4	1.4	4.9	48.1	\$65,833	0.0

Note:

¹ Percent of any race.

² Percent of population age 25 and older.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Summary Files 1 and 3, 2000.

For Further Information on Participating Districts...

West Metro Education Program	http://www.wmep.net/
Minneapolis Public Schools	http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us
Columbia Heights Schools	http://www.colheights.k12.mn.us/
Edina Public Schools	http://www.edina.k12.mn.us/
Hopkins Public Schools	http://www.hopkins.k12.mn.us/default.lasso
Richfield Public Schools	http://www.richfield.k12.mn.us/
Robbinsdale Area Schools	http://www.rdale.k12.mn.us/dist/
St. Louis Park Public Schools	http://www.slpschools.org/
St. Anthony/New Brighton Public Schools	http://www.stanthony.k12.mn.us/
Wayzata Public Schools	http://www.wayzata.k12.mn.us/

Characteristics of Suburban Choice Students

This section examines the characteristics of students participating in the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Similar data for students enrolling in a Minneapolis choice magnet school were not available.⁷ Consequently, this section compares the characteristics of students choosing to participate in the suburban choice program to all other eligible students who chose to remain in the Minneapolis school district, enrolling in either a choice magnet school or another Minneapolis public school.

As noted earlier, to be eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program a student must live within the Minneapolis school district and be eligible to receive a free or reduced price lunch. Approximately 68% of the Minneapolis public school students qualify each year for free or reduced price lunches. This amounted to roughly 31,000 of the 45,000 students enrolled in a Minneapolis public school during the 2000-01 school year, when students began submitting applications under *The Choice Is Yours* program for the following school year.⁸

In comparing participants in the suburban choice program to students who were eligible to participate but chose to remain in the Minneapolis school district some differences were notable (see Table 1.4). Approximately 1 out of every 4 students enrolling in the suburban choice program was white; 1 out of 2 students was black. Of the roughly 31,000 eligible students remaining in a Minneapolis school, 1 out of 10 was white and 1 out of 2 was black. Relatively few suburban choice participants were categorized as limited English proficiency (12%) as compared to one-third of eligible students who remained in the Minneapolis school district. About 15% of participants and non-participants were receiving special education services. Students of each gender were also equally represented in both groups. An

⁷ Insufficient data systems hampered the ability to collect accurate data on the enrollment of students in Minneapolis choice magnet schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program. For further discuss of data availability see Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Considerations and Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers for factors affecting data availability.

⁸ Minneapolis trend data released fall 2003 show that the district has lost 5500 students in the previous five years to a variety of school choices. Minneapolis public school enrollment in 2002-03 was 43,221; down from 45,051 in 2000-01, the year prior to *The Choice Is Yours*.

examination of student enrollment by grade level indicates that about 30% of suburban choice students enrolled at grades 1-5 compared to roughly 40% in the group of non-participants.

Table 1.5. Characteristics of suburban choice students and eligible, non-participants.

	Suburban Choice		Eligible, Non-participants ¹	
	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03
% Ethnicity				
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.6	1.6	4.6	4.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	9.7	9.4	18.1	17.2
Hispanic	7.0	6.9	14.0	16.1
Black, not Hispanic	55.6	54.4	52.0	51.8
White, not Hispanic	26.1	27.8	11.3	10.5
% Female	51.9	51.0	48.4	48.5
% Grade Level				
Kindergarten	5.6	6.5	8.1	8.1
Elementary (1-5)	31.1	30.2	41.4	38.7
Middle (6-8)	28.6	29.3	23.7	23.6
High School (9-12)	34.4	34.0	26.8	29.5
% Limited English Proficiency	12.3	11.6	33.9	33.3
% Special Education	16.3	13.0	15.2	14.6
N	486	759	30616	31417

Note: ¹ Includes all Minneapolis students who were eligible to participate in the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, but chose to remain in the district. As such, it includes students who enrolled in Minneapolis choice magnet schools and eligible students who chose neither option.

Source: 2001-02 and 2002-03 MARSS data.

Enrollment Patterns

Availability of Enrollment Data

Throughout the first two years of the program, student application, placement, and enrollment records for the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) component of *The Choice Is Yours* program were carefully tracked by the Minneapolis Student Accounting Office and representatives from the participating suburban districts.

Records of student applications, placement, and enrollment in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools, however, were only maintained during the first year of the program, not the second.⁹ Consequently, how many students requested choice magnet schools is unknown in the second year. Further complicating the matter is the fact that, for the most part, eligible students and their parents were not aware of Minneapolis choice school option under *The Choice Is Yours* program during the first two years, and thus they were not actively

⁹ See Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers for further discussion of factors affecting data availability.

“choosing” to participate in the intra-district portion of the program. Instead, as mentioned earlier, eligible students who requested a Minneapolis choice magnet school were simply assigned to the school if space was available. When selecting parents of “Minneapolis choice” students to interview, it was assumed that any student enrolled in these schools at the time of the interviews who also qualified for *The Choice Is Yours* program fit into this category.

In keeping with the original evaluation plan as approved by the state, this report focuses primarily on the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program and the enrollment patterns for these students. When available, data for the Minneapolis choice magnets is also provided.¹⁰

Are Parents and Students Receiving Their Desired Choices?

Suburban Choice Districts

According to the application and enrollment records, during the first two years of the program *all* students applying to suburban choice *districts* received one of their desired choices (some students applied to multiple districts). In fact, no student was denied admission to any of the suburban choice school districts during the first two years of the program. It is unknown whether suburban choice students received their choice of *schools* within their district of choice, as this data was not tracked during the first two years of the program.¹¹

Minneapolis Choice Magnet Schools

For the Minneapolis choice magnet schools, records available for the first year of the program indicate that 85% of the 118 eligible students requesting placement into Kindergarten at one of these schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program received their first choice when the request was submitted by the January 15 deadline. When *all* priority placements were taken into account, the data show that 90% of 268 students who met *The Choice Is Yours* eligibility requirements and requested placement into Kindergarten at a Minneapolis choice magnet school received their first choice (see Table 1.6). These data indicate that many of the students who are eligible to receive priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program are actually getting into these schools under other priority placements, such as English language learner (ELL) and sibling preference.

The data also indicate that a greater number of students are being placed into Minneapolis choice magnet schools on the basis of the priority placement criteria outlined by *The Choice Is Yours* program than would otherwise be placed under existing priority placements in the Minneapolis school district. During the first year of the program, for example, 150 of the 268 eligible students applying to Kindergarten at a Minneapolis choice magnet were eligible for

¹⁰ For more information, see Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Considerations.

¹¹ It has been proposed that subsequent evaluations of *The Choice Is Yours* support districts in developing data systems to monitor whether students are receiving their first or second choice of *schools*, both for the suburban choice and the Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

other priority placements; the remaining 118 were only eligible for priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Similarly, 80% of the 60 eligible students requesting placement into grades 1-5 at one of the Minneapolis choice magnet schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program received their first choice when the request was submitted by the January 15 deadline. When *all* priority placements are taken into account, the data show that 88% of 106 students who met *The Choice Is Yours* eligibility requirements and requested placement into grades 1-5 at a Minneapolis choice magnet school received their first choice (see Table 1.6). As was true for Kindergarten students, these data indicate that many of the grade 1-5 students who are eligible to receive priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program are actually getting into the Minneapolis choice magnet schools under other priority placements.

Likewise, the data indicate that a greater number of students in grades 1-5 are being placed into Minneapolis choice magnet schools on the basis of the priority placement criteria outlined by *The Choice Is Yours* program than would otherwise be placed under existing priority placements in the Minneapolis school district. During the first year of the program, 46 of the 106 eligible students applying to a Minneapolis choice magnet in grades 1-5 were eligible for other priority placements; the remaining 60 were only eligible for priority placement under *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Data on the placement of students in Minneapolis choice magnet schools was not available for second year of the program.

Table 1.6. Percent of eligible students receiving first choice at Minneapolis choice magnet schools during the first year of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Priority Placements ¹	% Receiving First Choice in Minneapolis Choice Magnet Schools 2001-2002	
	Kindergarten	Grades 1-5
Placed under <i>The Choice Is Yours</i> priority of eligible for free/reduced price lunch; no additional priority placements	85% 100 of 118 applications	80% 48 of 60 applications
Placed under <u>all</u> priority placements, including <i>The Choice Is Yours</i> and others, such as, ELL and sibling preference	90% 241 of 268 applications	88% 93 of 106 applications

Notes: ¹ Priority placements refer to school request submitted by the January 15 deadline.
Source: Minneapolis Office of Policy and Planning Services, 2001-02.

In Which Suburban Choice Districts Do Students Enroll?

As shown in Figure 1.3, a total of 1079 students enrolled in a suburban choice school through *The Choice Is Yours* program at some point during the first two years of the program, with 546 enrolling during the first year and 533 during the second.

The enrollment data maintained by participating school districts and shown in Figure 1.3 mirror the state data¹² presented in Table 1.3, which show that 8% of the suburban choice students were enrolled in kindergarten, 30% in grades 1-5, 28% in grades 6-8, and 34% in grades 9-12.

Fifty-nine percent of the 1079 students ever enrolled into a suburban choice enrolled *into* suburban districts located on the north side of Minneapolis while 41% enrolled *into* districts located to the south. From the first year to the next, the percentage of students enrolling into the northern suburbs dropped from 66% to 52%. In looking at where students transfer *from*, Figure 1.4 illustrates that over half of the students (552 of 1079 students) transfer out of three zip codes in north Minneapolis (55411, 55412, 55430).

In reflecting on individual districts' ability to attract students, a comparison of actual enrollments to the number of annual slots allocated to each district reveals that on average across the two years, five of the eight suburban school districts met or exceed their annual allotments (Figure 1.3). Three school districts – Edina, Hopkins, and Wayzata – had difficulty attracting students, despite the fact that Hopkins is typically a popular district for open enrollment students. As noted earlier, the greater distance from the city of Minneapolis to the Wayzata school district and many of the schools in the Hopkins school districts may account for the lower enrollment of students in these suburban choice school districts under *The Choice Is Yours* program. Another contributing factor may be that cities of Edina and Wayzata are culturally very different from the city Minneapolis, both in terms of racial diversity (much less diverse) and the socioeconomic status of residents (much higher). Such differences may be influencing the choices of potential applicants. Together, however, the eight suburban choice districts met the annual target of enrolling at least 500 additional students each year.

Are Students Staying in Suburban Districts?

Official end-of-year enrollment figures show 505 students enrolled in suburban choice schools at the end of 2001-02, the first year of *The Choice Is Yours* program (see Figure 1.5). At the end of year two, a total of 720 students were still enrolled in the program of which 301 or 42% were returning and 419 were new students (see Figure 1.6). The vast majority of new and returning students were enrolled in districts to the north of Minneapolis (52% and 61%, respectively.)

¹² Data in Table 1.3 are from the official Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) database.

As of June 2, 2003, 38% of students who ever enrolled in a suburban choice school (409 of 1079) had left the program. While 27% of these students left to an unknown destination,¹³ 11% percent students returned to Minneapolis. Of these, 37% enrolled in a Minneapolis high school. As indicated by the data in Figure 1.7, none of the students who returned to the district enrolled in a Minneapolis choice magnet school. It is interesting to note that while 43% of the students who ever enrolled in a suburban choice school were enrolled in a Minneapolis Public School just prior to their enrollment in *The Choice Is Yours* program, only 11% chose to return to the district to enroll in another Minneapolis Public School.

Is *The Choice Is Yours* Enhancing Educational Opportunities for Minneapolis Students?

The data in Figure 1.8 illustrate the effect that *The Choice Is Yours* program has had on applications for open enrollment out of Minneapolis by race. During the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program, the total number of open enrollment *applications* increased by 688, up from 1467 applications during the two years just prior to the program to 2155 total applications. At the same time, a total of 1079 applications for open enrollment were received under *The Choice Is Yours* program, suggesting that some of the students who were previously applying under the general open enrollment program were now applying under *The Choice Is Yours* program. Thus, during the first two years of the program, half of all open enrollment applications came through *The Choice Is Yours* program.

In examining the data in Figure 1.8 by race, it is also evident that more black students are applying for open enrollment through *The Choice Is Yours* program. Before *The Choice Is Yours* program was instituted, black students made up 29% of all open enrollment applications; this percentage increased to 44% by the end of the program's second year. Taken together, these data suggest that the program has indeed improved educational opportunities for Minneapolis students.

¹³ Anecdotal data suggests that some of these students are moving out of Minneapolis and into the suburban district of choice. Future evaluations will attempt to capture this information.

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Source: Minneapolis Student Accounting Office, July 3, 2003.

INSERT FIGURE 1.4: TCIY TRANSFERS OUT OF MPLS BY ZIP CODE

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Source: Minneapolis Student Accounting Office, July 9,

INSERT FIGURE 1.7 HERE

Figure 1.8: Percentage of open-enrollment transfers out of Minneapolis by ethnicity and the effect of the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program

	02/03 Minneapolis Enrollment	99/00 & 00/01 Percent of O.E. Applications	01/02 & 02/03 Percent of O.E. Apps. Including TCIY	01/02 & 02/03 Percent of O.E Apps. TCIY Only
Native American -	4%	43 3%	50 2%	33 3%
African American -	43%	426 29%	956 44%	623 58%
Asian American -	14%	101 7%	185 9%	95 9%
Hispanic American -	13%	73 5%	144 7%	74 7%
White American -	<u>26%</u>	<u>824 56%</u>	<u>820 38%</u>	<u>254 23%</u>
	100%	1467 100%	2155 100%	1079 100%

Minneapolis Accounting Office (REG – CIYETH 7/03)

Transporting Suburban Choice Students

As was mentioned earlier, transportation plays an integral part in the success of *The Choice Is Yours* program, particularly for students attending suburban choice schools. Through the program eligible students who open enroll into a suburban choice district are provided with transportation to and from their school of choice by the Wide Area Transportation System (WATS). To better understand the complexity of this aspect of the program, a transportation report was requested from WATS.

WATS and *The Choice Is Yours* Suburban School Districts

The routing of buses for *The Choice Is Yours* program differs from routes developed for most school districts. In a typical district, corner stops are established and every student walks to one of these stops along the route. In contrast, because the transportation program for *The Choice Is Yours* must cover a vast geographical area with such a low density of students, the routes are specifically designed to meet the needs of the students attending each of the schools. In some districts, like Richfield and Robbinsdale, some of the schools have enough students that more standard routes can be set and students can easily find a stop close to their home. Overall, the vast majority of routes can go unchanged for months; still, within this system WATS made an average of 15 changes per week on the routes. Since transportation covers such a large geographical area for *The Choice Is Yours* program, WATS worked with nine different bus contractors to provide the busing service.

Each district was responsible for sending the list of eligible transportation students and schools to the WATS office. WATS did all the routing of students and sent the route information back to the districts and to the bus contractors. At the beginning of the school year WATS sent out postcards to all students notifying them of their busing information. During the year WATS also call parents to let them know when any changes occurred that affected the routes more than 5 minutes.

Each month the districts received their transportation bill from WATS. Each bill listed the cost by school and the number of days each school received service. Along with the bill the districts received an alphabetical list of all their students with busing information, a copy of their routes to be sent on to their individual schools, and lists of students who are also picking up the bus on *The Choice Is Yours* route, though they are not in the program (i.e., other open enrollment students), along with a list of students who may be homeless.

Transportation Statistics

WATS transported students to eight suburban districts and 60 schools in the morning and afternoon as part of *The Choice Is Yours* program, and also ran late Activity Buses for four schools (see Table 1.7). WATS routed the buses so they had two or three different schools in the morning and afternoon. All of the routing was based on different school start times.

Table 1.7. Number of *The Choice Is Yours* schools served each day by WATS.

District	Number of Schools Served Daily
Columbia Heights	5
Hopkins	7
Edina	9
Richfield	4
Robbinsdale	17
St. Anthony/New Brighton	3
St. Louis Park	7
Wayzata	8

Source: WATS records, March 25, 2003.

The following is a snapshot of WATS activity related to *The Choice Is Yours* program taken on March 25, 2003:

- 1,015 students were riding the bus daily. This figure included 849 *The Choice Is Yours* students (of which 24 were homeless students), and another 166 open enrollment students who used the transportation system by going to an existing stop and catching the bus to their school program.
- The breakdown of students who ride the bus by grade level was 335 students in grades K–5, 300 students in grades 6-8, and 380 students in grade 9-12.
- A total of 1,280 students from *The Choice Is Yours* program were in the WATS database as of this date, which meant that 265 students had discontinued their busing service at some point during the current school year.

In order to transport a total of 1,015 students to 60 schools across eight school districts, the following transportation statistics applied:

- Number of different morning start times = 24
- Number of different noon start times = 6
- Number of different ending times = 25
- Number of daily buses¹⁴ = 45
- Number of different runs during a single school day¹⁵ = 173
- Shortest run = 4.23 miles
- Longest run = 38.53 miles
- Total bus miles in a day = 2,352 miles
- Shortest time on the bus = 13 minutes

¹⁴ Including 20 buses during the middle of the day.

¹⁵ Including all the morning, noon and afternoon runs.

- Longest time on the bus = 1 hour and 36 minutes
- Average time on the bus = 40 minutes
- Total hours buses are transporting students each day = 114 hours

Transportation Challenges

Throughout the program's first two year, the same WATS representative has worked closely with *The Choice Is Yours* district staff to set up appropriate transportation and address emerging issues. From the perspective of WATS, one of the biggest challenges in providing this type of transportation was keeping track of eight different district calendars and making sure all of the contractors knew which schools were in session every day. A particular challenge was the fact that some districts had early release or late start days and transportation could not be provided for these exceptions because the daily routes were set and some of the buses were already transporting students from four or eight different districts each day.

Section 2:

Parent Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction

Telephone interviews were conducted with parents of children who were eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program to find out how they selected a school for their child and their satisfaction with their choice. Parents were also asked about other ways they were involved in their child's education. This section presents findings that are based primarily on the responses of the parents of three parent groups: suburban choice parents, Minneapolis choice parents¹⁶, and eligible, non-participating parents.

Evaluation Topics and Guiding Questions: Parent Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction

Questions 3-7 are addressed in this section on Parent's Reasons for Choice, Involvement and Satisfaction.

3. Why are parents participating or not participating in the inter-district transfer program?
4. What types of information inform parents' decisions about the inter-district transfer program?
5. What schools and programs are most attractive to parents and why?
6. What effect does participation in the inter-district transfer program have on the types and levels of parent involvement and home-school communication?
7. How satisfied are inter-district transfer program parents with their current choice?

Questions 8-10 are addressed in the next section on School Responsiveness.

8. How do schools recruit and welcome inter-district transfer program participants?
9. What are inter-district transfer program parent perceptions of the racial climate in the schools and how does this compare to other parent perceptions?
10. According to parents, in what ways are schools addressing the needs of diverse students?

Data sources: 260 telephone interviews with parents of inter-district (suburban choice) and intra-district (Minneapolis choice magnet) students; 270 telephone interview with parents on non-participating students, including parents of eligible but non-participating students; and 155 surveys from parents of students already attending suburban schools.

¹⁶ Due to a lack of placement and enrollment data for students entering Minneapolis choice magnet schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program, the sample of parents drawn to represent this population was based on the population of all students attending a Minneapolis choice magnet school who were eligible to attend through the program. As such, this sample of parents may include parents of students who were placed into these schools under other priority placements, such as sibling preference or ELL preference, or parents of students who had enrolled in the school prior to the start of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Given the nature of questioning in the parent interviews, this method of sampling was considered appropriate. See Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Considerations and Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers for more information on factors related to data availability.

Why Do Parents Participate in *The Choice Is Yours*?

In an effort to determine why some parents elected to have their child participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program while others did not, parents were asked about their previous school choices and what influenced their decision to select one school over another.

Often parents who select non-traditional school choice options, such as enrolling their child into a new inter-district transfer program, have been actively examining their choices in the past. To assess prior school choice behavior parents were asked “Have you ever enrolled any of your children in a private school or charter school?” and “Have you ever home-schooled any of your children, rather than enroll them in a public or private school?” As noted in Table 2.1, parents’ responses indicated some differences among the three groups of parents – suburban choice, Minneapolis choice, and non-participants – in their prior school choices:

- 1 in 3 suburban choice parents had previously enrolled a child in a private or charter school; more than double the rate for non-participating parents. Roughly 1 in 5 Minneapolis choice parents had previously enrolled a child in a private or charter school.
- Few parents had previously home schooled any of their children. Still, roughly 1 in 10 suburban choice parents had elected to do so in the past compared to 1 in 20 for Minneapolis choice and non-participating parents.

Table 2.1. Parents’ prior school choices.

	Participants		Eligible, Non-Participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Ever enrolled <u>any</u> of your children in a private school or charter school?	33.8%	19.5%	14.8%	.001***	2
Ever taught <u>any</u> of your children at home rather than enrolling them in a public or private school?	11.0	5.6	5.2	.128	2

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q1 and Q2.

Parents’ school choices depend in part on their awareness of available options. When parents were asked, “Have you heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program?” their responses suggest poor name recognition with regard to the program. Only 1 in 10 parents of eligible, non-participating students and 2 of 10 parents of students attending Minneapolis choice schools students recognized the program by name (see Table 2.2). In contrast, 4 out of 5 of parents whose child was currently enrolled in a suburban choice school said they had heard of the program. Further analyses revealed that English-speaking parents were more than twice as likely to recognize program by name as non-English speakers (44% vs. 17%).

Table 2.2. Parents' awareness of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=129)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=134)	Minneapolis Choice (n=122)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Have heard of program ¹	77.6%	18.9%	10.9%	.000***	2

Notes: ¹ Parents were asked "Have you heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program?" thus requiring name recognition.

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q9 and Q9c.

The poor name recognition for the program may suggest that the state's outreach efforts did not provide sufficient "branding" or perhaps that the branding was effective, but not across all populations. The fact that the Minneapolis choice option was not well publicized within the school district during the first two years of the program may have contributed to poor name recognition even among the Minneapolis choice parents, despite the fact that the state's outreach efforts included this choice option among the other school choices available to parents. The data showing that 22% of suburban choice parents did not recognize the program by name might be explained by the fact that some of the students were already enrolled in the suburban district under open enrollment, and were not aware that their enrollment now qualified under *The Choice Is Yours* program. The latter possibility is supported by data indicating that of the suburban choice parents who *had* heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program, only 86% were aware that their child was currently enrolled in program (see Table 2.3). Moreover, data collected in the focus groups with *The Choice Is Yours* students indicated that only 60% of the students had heard of the program by name and only 44% were aware of their participation in the program.

Table 2.3. Parents' awareness of child's enrollment in *The Choice Is Yours* program.

	Participants	
	Suburban Choice (n=104)	Minneapolis Choice (n=23)
Heard of program and have child currently enrolled in it.	85.6%	4 of 23

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q9 and Q9c.

When asked why, when they were aware of *The Choice Is Yours* program, they chose not to enroll their child in it, the non-participating parents cited the following reasons: ¹⁷ lack of knowledge about the program or learning about after child was already enrolled in school,

¹⁷ Only those parents that said they had heard of the program were asked the follow-up questions, such as why they chose not to participate or how they had heard of the program.

satisfaction with their current school, distance to the schools, and too many family transitions already (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4. Why parents of eligible children did not enroll their child in *The Choice Is Yours* program.

<p>Little knowledge of program</p> <p>Satisfied with current school</p> <p>Too far to ride/drive</p> <p>Minimize disruptions/transitions</p> <p>Learned about the program late and child was already enrolled in a school</p>

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q9c-2 (Eligible, Non-participants n=14).

Parents who had heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program were asked *how* they had heard of the program. As shown in Table 2.5, parents of suburban choice students were most likely to say they had heard about the program from a friend, relative, or neighbor (35%); former school or district (which included the Minneapolis Welcome Centers) (28%); materials about the program (which may have been mailed home to parents or picked up at another location) (20%); or through newspaper or television media (18%). Another 13% of suburban parents said they had heard about *The Choice Is Yours* program from a community organization and mentioned the Phillips Community Center, Central Cultural Chicano, Sabathani, Minneapolis Urban League, Head Start, PACER, and area churches. These avenues were also the ways in which parents *first* heard about the program.

Parents of suburban choice students were also asked what influenced their initial decision¹⁸ to enroll their child in *The Choice Is Yours* program and which of these factors *most influenced* their decision. As shown in Table 2.6, visits to the child's current school (28%), a recommendation from someone they knew (22%), and conditions they characterized as either a "push" out of or a "pull" towards another school district (22%) were identified as *most* influential in parents' decisions to enroll their child in the program. Examples of "pulls" ("pushes") include a desire for a better education (desire to leave a school with a poor academic record) and safer school environment (wanting to leave a school they considered unsafe). A recommendation from someone they knew and program materials also played a role in parents' decision to enroll their child in *The Choice Is Yours* program.

¹⁸ That is, when the child first entered the program.

Table 2.5. How parents heard about The Choice Is Yours program.

How did you hear about the program? ¹	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=14)
	Suburban Choice (n=103)	Minneapolis Choice (n=23)	
A friend, relative, or neighbor	35.0%	4 of 23	3 of 14
A community organization	12.6	5 of 23	2 of 14
Former school or district	28.2	5 of 23	4 of 14
Current school	8.7	1 of 23	1 of 14
Materials about the program	20.4	7 of 23	1 of 14
Newspaper or television	17.5	4 of 23	3 of 14
Radio	2.0	0 of 23	0 of 14
During registration	2.0	0 of 23	1 of 14
Worked in district	4.0	2 of 23	0 of 14
How did you <u>first</u> hear about the program?			
A friend, relative, or neighbor	26.5%	1 of 23	3 of 14
A community organization	9.8	4 of 23	2 of 14
Former school or district	24.5	4 of 23	3 of 14
Current school	7.8	1 of 23	1 of 14
Materials about the program	13.7	7 of 23	1 of 14
Newspaper or television	11.8	2 of 23	1 of 14
Radio	1.0	0 of 23	2 of 14
During registration	2.0	2 of 23	1 of 14
Worked in district	2.0	0 of 23	0 of 14
Total	100%		

Notes: ¹ Open-ended question. Up to three responses were coded for each respondent.
Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q9a and Q9b.

Table 2.6. Factors influencing parents' initial decision to enroll child in *The Choice Is Yours*.

	Suburban Choice (n= 89)
Which of the following most influenced your decision? ¹	
Recommendation from someone you know	21.6%
Recommendation from a community organization	7.8
Recommendation from a school or a school district where your child attended in the past	13.7
Visit to your child's current school	27.5
Brochure, video, or other material about your child's current school (includes information about the program)	5.9
Something you read in the newspaper	2.0
Something you heard on the radio	0.0
Something else (pushes and pulls)	21.6
Total	100%
Which of the following influenced your decision (all applicable)? ²	
Recommendation from someone you know	31.5%
Recommendation from a community organization	11.2
Recommendation from a school or a school district where your child attended in the past	25.0
Visit to your child's current school	53.9
Brochure, video, or other material about your child's current school (includes information about the program)	20.2
Something you read in the newspaper	13.5
Something you heard on the radio	3.4
Something else (pushes and pulls)	23.6

Notes: ¹ Parents were asked to identify one item from the list.

² Parents were asked to respond to each item.

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q9c-1, Q9c-1i.

When asked if they would have preferred for their child to be enrolled in a Minneapolis public school, if a suitable one was available, 39% of parents of suburban choice students said yes and 61% said no (see Table 2.7). Those that would have preferred to stay in the Minneapolis school district explained the importance of being close to home. Those that preferred to leave characterized the Minneapolis schools as providing a poor quality education or failing to offer a safe learning environment.

Table 2.7. Reasons why suburban choice parents want their child to remain or to leave the Minneapolis school district.

	Percent (n=134)	
Prefer to remain in Minneapolis 38.8		
Close to home ¹	55.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because he can be close to home and build friendships with the people in the community.” ▪ “It’s very difficult for our family to participate in the activities at the school because it’s far away.”
Diversity of student body ¹	7.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “He is African American and culturally he should be with his own race.”
Prefer to leave Minneapolis 61.2		
Poor quality education ²	23.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “There is a higher level of education and people in the suburbs.”
Unsafe environment ²	14.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “We didn’t want him going to school in the inner city; it is too dangerous of an area.”
Prefer suburban schools ²	9.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I like the [suburban] schools better. Minneapolis doesn’t provide well for the students.”
Student choice/preference ²	7.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “[My son] says he feels more comfortable now.”
Poor quality teaching staff ²	7.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I don’t like the way the kids are being taught in Minneapolis.”
Large class/school size ²	6.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The Minneapolis schools are overcrowded.”

Note: ¹ Of those who would have preferred to remain in Minneapolis (n=52)

² Of those who would have preferred to leave Minneapolis (n=82)

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q17

Which Schools Are Most Attractive To Parents?

To better understand parents’ current school choices, they were asked to identify where their child had attended school the previous year (2001-2002) and what type of school it was. As shown in Table 2.8, almost all students who were currently enrolled in a Minneapolis school – a Minneapolis choice magnet school or another public school – had been enrolled in the district the previous year as well.

In contrast, only 45% of the students currently enrolled in a suburban choice district were enrolled in the Minneapolis school district the previous school year (2001-2002). (Table 2.8 below confirms this data based on the number of years these students have been enrolled in their current suburban choice district with 45% of parents reporting that the 2002-2003 school year was their child’s first year in a suburban choice district.)

Table 2.8. Location of school attended previous year (2001-2002).

	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=134)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=129)	Minneapolis Choice (n=123)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Minneapolis Public Schools	44.9%	97.6%	98.5%	.000***	8
Another Minnesota school district	53.5	1.6	1.5		
Another state	1.6	0.8	0.0		
Outside the United States	0.0	0.0	0.0		

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q7, 7a, 7b.

Parents were also asked what type of school their child had attended during the previous school year. All of the eligible non-participating students and 98% of the students enrolled in a Minneapolis choice schools had been enrolled the previous year in a public school (see Table 2.9). Less than 2% of Minneapolis choice students had been attending a charter school the year before. In contrast, 86% of suburban choice students had been enrolled in a public school the previous year, 5% had been enrolled in a charter school, and 5% in a private or parochial school. A few suburban choice students had been home schooled the previous year, while others had split their time between a public and a non-public school setting.

Table 2.9. Type of school attended previous year (2001-2002).

Type of school	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=133)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=130)	Minneapolis Choice (n=123)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Public	85.4%	97.6%	100.0%	.000***	8
Charter	4.6	1.6	0.0		
Private or parochial	5.3	0.0	0.0		
Home schooled	1.5	0.0	0.0		
Other ¹	3.1	0.8	0.0		

***p<=.001

¹Other = a combination of public and private (e.g., half year each) or public and charter.

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q8.

As noted in Table 2.10, 76% of the students attending suburban choice schools had been in their *current district* only one or two years; a period concurrent with *The Choice Is Yours* program. The remaining 24% of the suburban choice students had enrolled in the district prior to the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours* program (i.e., having been enrolled in the district for three or more years). This implies that the child either lived in the suburban district at some point in time or was living elsewhere and enrolled into the suburban district under open enrollment or another enrollment agreement.

Similarly, Table 2.10 shows that 86% of the students attending suburban choice schools had been in their *current school* only one or two years. Of the students who changed schools

within the district from one year to the next, most were likely transitioning from elementary to middle/junior high or from middle/junior high to high school.

In comparison, 37% of Minneapolis choice students had reportedly just enrolled in their current choice magnet school in the last two years; that is, since the start of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the Minneapolis choice students had enrolled in their current choice magnet school prior to the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours*. Thus it appears that of the students who were eligible to attend the Minneapolis choice magnet schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program many were already doing so. Given that the choice magnet schools are elementary schools serving grades K-5 or K-8, it is feasible that more than half of the students might have remained in the same school over a period of three or four years.

Finally, enrollment trends for non-participating students show that 70% of these Minneapolis students had been enrolled in their current school for only one or two years, suggesting a high rate of mobility for this group.

Table 2.10. Years child has been attending current school and/or district.

	Participants		Eligible, Non- Participants (n=131)
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=123)	
Attended school in this district			
1 year or less	44.9%	--	--
2 years	30.9	--	--
3 years	8.1	--	--
4+ years	16.2	--	--
Attended current school			
1 year or less	54.4%	26.0%	42.7%
2 years	30.9	11.4	26.7
3 years	6.6	11.4	13.7
4+ years	8.1	51.2	16.8

Notes: "--" = question not asked of these populations

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q10, Q11.

Factors Influencing School Choice

Parents were also asked “What’s most important to you in choosing a school for any of your children?” Across all three parent populations – suburban and Minneapolis choice participants and non-participants – the majority of parents identified some aspect of a school’s “academic quality” as their most important consideration when selecting schools (see Table 2.11). Academic quality included references to the level of academic challenge, demonstrated high levels of achievement and school rankings, well-prepared teachers, and the type and variety of curriculum offerings. All together these elements of academic quality were listed as a primary consideration for one-half to two-thirds of parents.

When asked what else they looked for in a school, a positive school climate (safe learning environment and sense of community) were mentioned by roughly one-third of the parents in each group (see Table 2.12). The location of the school was also important to parents whose child stayed in Minneapolis, either at one of the Minneapolis choice magnet schools or another school. Some parents of suburban and Minneapolis choice students also mentioned diversity of the student body and small school or class sizes as key factors.

Table 2.11. Parents' primary considerations when choosing a school.

Most important considerations in choosing a school for children ¹	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=132)	Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		
Quality education	33.1%	30.6%	18.2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "A school where she will be academically challenged." ▪ "The academics and education standards." ▪ "The teachers' interest and enthusiasm." ▪ "The teachers would have to have good skills." ▪ "The average achievement level for students should be high." ▪ "How well the school ranks among other schools." ▪ "The types of classes they are offering." ▪ "A well-balanced education that offers social interaction, arts, phy ed, as well as academics."
Quality teaching staff	6.6	8.9	18.2	
Good school/reputation	7.4	8.1	6.8	
Curriculum offerings	18.4	9.7	10.6	
Academic Quality	65.5%	57.3%	53.8%	
Safe environment	9.6	8.1	7.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "I want the kids to be safe in school." ▪ "No violence in the school." ▪ "They have to care about my kid and what he is learning." ▪ "How the teachers relate with the kids."
Positive learning environment	6.6	7.3	3.8	
School Climate	16.2%	15.4%	11.4%	
Location	2.9	6.4	6.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Distance from home to school." ▪ "Whichever one's closest to home." ▪ "I like smaller class sizes." ▪ "Student-teacher ratio."
Small school/class size	5.2	6.4	3.8	

Note: ¹ Listed in order of frequency, beginning with the most common response overall

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q3.

Table 2.12. Parents' other considerations when choosing a school.

Other important considerations in choosing a school for children ¹	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=92)	Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=114)	Minneapolis Choice (n=103)		
Quality education	19.3%	17.5%	16.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The quality of the learning and academics at the school.” ▪ “A well-educated teaching staff.” ▪ “The attitude of the teachers—that they’re excited about their work.” ▪ “How high the school rates in their academics.” ▪ “The credibility of the school.” ▪ “Spanish immersion was important.” ▪ “Having music and science stuff, physical activity.” ▪
Quality teaching staff	21.9	25.2	18.5	
Good school/reputation	5.3	8.7	7.6	
Curriculum offerings	8.8	11.7	9.8	
Academic Quality	55.3%	63.1%	52.2	
Safe environment	17.5	15.5	18.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ▪ “It has to be a safe environment.” ▪ “A school where there aren’t any conflicts or violence.” ▪ “A good community atmosphere.” ▪ “Just the basic feeling you get when you walk into the school.” ▪
Positive learning environment	18.4	17.5	8.7	
School Climate	35.9%	33.0%	27.2%	
Location	7.0	11.6	18.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The area that it’s in.” ▪ “Reasonably close to home.”
Small school/class size	7.9	9.7	4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The smaller the school, sometimes the kids have more one-on-one teaching.”
Diversity of student body	7.9	8.7	1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “There has to be a lot of cultures in the school.” ▪ “Diversity of the population of the school.”

Note: ¹ Listed in order of frequency, beginning with the most common response overall

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q4.

Choosing a Suburban School District

In addition to asking parents about school choice decisions in general, parents of suburban choice students were also asked why they had chosen the particular *school district* in which their child was currently enrolled. For the most part, their responses reflected their earlier comments regarding what they looked for when choosing a school for any of their children.

One third of suburban choice parents specifically identified some aspect of “academic quality” as the *main* reason they chose their child’s current school district (see Table 2.13). Another 18% were dissatisfied with their child’s previous school district and looking for “improvements” or simply a “change”. Another 18% of parents said they chose the district primarily because of its location, saying either that it was close to home, work, or daycare or that they had previously lived in the district. Finally, six percent of parents said they chose the district because their child had a friend or a sibling who was currently or previously enrolled in the district and had characterized their experience in the district as being good.

Table 2.13. Primary reason parents enrolled child in current suburban choice district.

	Percent (n=134)	Sample Comments
Quality education	11.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because it had high educational standards.” ▪ “Needed to be challenged.”
Good school/reputation	15.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because in some magazine I read that it was one of the best public schools in the country.” ▪ “The academic scores of the Wayzata school district.”
Curriculum offerings	5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because they offered ASL.” ▪ “I wanted better curriculum.”
Academic Quality	32.8%	
Improvement / change from previous district	17.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “To get her out of Minneapolis.” ▪ “We wanted to see if it would be different from Minneapolis.”
Location	17.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Location of his daycare, my job, and home.” ▪ “I lived out there at the time.”
Family/friends attend	6.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “One of my friends had a child there, so I was already familiar with the district.” ▪ “My daughter went there before him.”

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q11.

When asked what else played into their decision to enroll their child in a suburban choice district, 15% of parents said they felt the district provided a safer learning environment (see Table 2.14).

Table 2.14. Other reasons parents enrolled child in current suburban choice district.

	Percent (n=81)	Sample Comments
Quality education	11.1%	▪ “Better education than the inner city schools.”
Quality teaching staff	14.8	▪ “Excellent teachers with one-on-one interaction.”
Good school/reputation	12.3	▪ “The school was rated higher academically.”
Academic Quality	38.2%	
Improvement over/change from previous district	9.9	▪ “I didn’t want him to get left behind over at Minneapolis.”
Safe environment	14.8	▪ “I have a feeling that the school in the suburb is safer.”
Location	8.6	▪ “His dad lived there so it was easier.”

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q12

Choosing a Minneapolis or Suburban School

Parents of suburban choice, Minneapolis choice, and non-participating students were all asked why they had chosen their child’s *current school* (see Table 2.15). Academic quality was again listed as a *main* reason for selecting a particular school, but did not figure as prominently as it did when parents were asked, more generally, how they went about choosing a school for any of their children. In this instance, Minneapolis choice parents were most likely to cite some element of academic quality as their main reason for selecting their child’s current school (45%). In contrast, parents of non-participants identified the school’s location as their most important reason for selecting their child’s school. After academic quality, location was the main reason parents of suburban choice students selected their child’s particular school.

Another reason for choosing a specific school that was given by some parents of non-participants was somewhat unexpected. Twelve percent of parents of non-participants characterized their choice of school as being made for them. Examples of such “assisted choice” included parents’ mention of a previous teacher enrolling the child at the new school or someone else from the child’s current school “picking the school for him” (see Table 2.15). Other reasons parents gave for choosing their child’s current school were that other family members or friends of the child were also attending that school (all parent groups), convenient location of the school and/or liking the neighborhood surrounding the school

(Minneapolis choice and non-participants), and the extracurricular activities and safe learning environment available at the school (suburban choice) (see Table 2.16).

Table 2.15. Main reason parents enrolled child in current school.

	Participants		Eligible, Non- Participants (n=133)	Significance		Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=135)	Minneapolis Choice (n=123)		Chi-sq.	d.f.	
Quality education	9.6%	4.1%	5.3%	.000***	52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I thought it was a better school in terms of the quality of education.” ▪ “Because of their standard of education was so high.” ▪ “Because I heard they have good test scores.” ▪ “I had heard through word of mouth and church that it was excellent.” ▪ “We liked the fine arts program.” ▪ “Because of the Spanish immersion program.”
Good school/reputation	14.1	17.9	10.5			
Curriculum offerings	4.4	17.1	4.5			
Academic Quality	28.1%	39.1%	20.3%			
Improvement over/change from previous district	6.7	5.7	3.8			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “It’s a good school, and... he is getting more help there than at his previous school.” ▪ “It was an improved community compared to where he was.”
Location	19.3	9.7%	26.3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “That was the closest elementary school they had.” ▪ “We were still living in the Richfield district at the time so it was convenient.”
Friends/family attend	8.1	10.6	7.5			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They offered open enrollment and that is where all her friends were going.” ▪ “Because his sister attended there.”
Student support services	3.0	8.9	7.5			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “It dealt with children with disabilities well.” ▪ “The school accommodated my needs, as a person who doesn't speak English fluently, with Hmong interpreters.”
Assisted choice	1.5	6.5	12.0			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The school he was going to picked the school for him.” ▪ “Her sixth grade teacher enrolled her at [school].”

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q14.

Table 2.16. Other reasons parents enrolled child in current school.

	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=69)	Significance		Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=61)	Minneapolis Choice (n=77)		Chi-sq.	d.f.	
Quality education	11.5%	5.2%	1.4%	N/A (combined responses)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “We knew that he would get a good education.”
Quality teaching staff	6.6	13.0	15.9			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Great teacher aides and well-educated teachers.”
Good school/reputation	14.8	20.8	10.1			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I heard through the grapevine that [it] was a very good school academically.”
Curriculum offerings	4.9	15.6	8.7			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They teach different languages and fine arts subjects.”
Academic Quality	37.8%	54.6%	36.1%			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪
Location	9.8	19.5	24.5			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “It was in a good neighborhood.” ▪ “Reasonable distance from home.”
Friends/family attend	13.1	10.4	10.1			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “My niece was also attending the school.”
Safe environment	11.5	5.2	2.9			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “It’s a safe atmosphere.”
Extracurricular activities	9.8	2.6	7.2			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They have good after school options and tutoring programs available.”
Positive learning environment	6.6	6.5	4.3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Relation between teachers and parents and other students.”

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q15

Finally, all three groups of parents were asked what influenced their initial decision¹⁹ to enroll their child in the *current school* and which of these factors *most influenced* their decision. As shown in Table 2.17, the greatest influence on parents' decision-making in each of the groups was a visit to the child's current school, with such visits being especially informative for parents of suburban choice students. A recommendation from someone they knew was the next greatest influence on parents' decisions to enroll their child in a particular school. For eligible, non-participants – students who chose to remain in a non-choice Minneapolis public school – the recommendation from the school or district their child attended in the past was also very influential. This finding suggests that this group of parents may be paying particular attention to the recommendations of people they trust in the Minneapolis public school district.

Table 2.17. All factors influencing parents' initial decision to enroll child in current school.

Which of the following influenced your decision (all applicable)? ¹	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=131)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Recommendation from someone you know	45.6%	53.2%	28.5%	.000***	2
Recommendation from a community organization	7.4	9.8	5.5	.432	2
Recommendation from a school or a school district where your child attended in the past	17.9	22.0	34.6	.005**	2
Recommendation from your child's current school or school district	21.5	25.2	29.1	.362	2
Visit to your child's current school	53.7	56.1	49.6	.576	2
A brochure, video, or other material about your child's current school ²	20.0	11.6	10.7	.057	2
Something they read in the newspaper	10.3	2.4	5.4	.028*	2
Something they heard on the radio	3.7	0.0	3.8	.094	2
Welcome center	1.5	3.2	2.2	.638	2
Other family/friends attended there	2.2	2.4	2.2	.992	2
Something else (pushes and pulls)	11.0	11.3	19.5	.081	2

Notes: ¹ Parents were asked to respond to each item.

² For suburban choice parents, this includes information on *The Choice Is Yours* program which highlights specific suburban schools.

*p<=.05, **p<=.01, ***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q16.

Aside from school visits and recommendations from people they knew, parents also relied on recommendations from a school or district their child attended in the past, recommendations from their child's current school or district, and informational materials about their child's current school (see Table 2.18). One in five parents of suburban choice students said that information gleaned from a brochure, video or other materials was influential in their

¹⁹ That is, when the child first entered the program.

decision to enroll their child in a particular school. Still other parents mentioned the significance of “pushes and pulls” such as the desire for a better education or desire to leave a school with a poor academic record, and the pull towards a safer school environment and the push of leaving a school they considered unsafe.

Table 2.18. Factors most influencing parents’ initial decision to enroll child in current school.

Which of the following MOST influenced your initial decision? ¹	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=63)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=68)	Minneapolis Choice (n=70)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
A recommendation from someone you know	27.9%	27.1%	15.9%	.013*	14
A recommendation from a community organization	1.5	8.6	3.2		
A recommendation from a school or a school district where your child attended in the past	7.4	10.0	31.7		
A recommendation from your child’s current school or school district	8.8	5.7	9.5		
A visit to your child’s current school	42.6	34.3	23.8		
A brochure, video, or other material about your child’s current school	2.9	2.9	3.2		
Something you read in the newspaper	1.5	0.0	3.2		
Something you heard on the radio	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Something else (pushes and pulls)	7.4	11.4	9.5		

Notes: ¹ Parents were asked to identify one item from the list.

*p<=.05, **p<=.01, ***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q16j.

Parent Involvement

Parental involvement has been identified as influential in promoting student success for the simple fact that parents who are more informed about their child’s school activities, progress, and challenges have a greater opportunity to offer support, both to the school and to their child. In an effort to inform and involve all parents, schools generally encourage parent involvement through a variety of means.

Roughly 90% or more of suburban choice, Minneapolis choice, and non-participating parents said that their child’s school encouraged parent participation and that it would have been easy for them to become involved if they had wanted to (see Table 2.19). In fact, almost all parents of non-participating students (97%) said their child’s school paved the way for their involvement.

Table 2.19. Parent perceptions of opportunities to be involved with their child's school.

	Participants				Eligible, Non-participants (n= 135)		Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n= 136)		Minneapolis Choice (n= 124)					
	Percent							
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Chi- sq.	d.f.
Your child’s school encouraged parent participation.	45.5	46.3	54.1	41.0	47.0	43.3	.511	6
If you wanted to, it would have been easy for you to become involved in your child’s school.	54.9	34.6	46.3	42.1	51.2	45.7	.114	6

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q18.

When asked whether they had been involved with their child's school during the most recent school year, the vast majority of parents in all three groups (close to 90%) said they had been to the school for a parent-teacher conference and 76% to 87% had been to the school for an informal talk with a teacher or principal (see Table 2.20). In the latter instance, parents of suburban choice and Minneapolis choice students were more likely to have gone to the school for an informal conversation with school staff than were parents of non-participants. More than 3 out of 4 parents in each group visited their child's school or classroom, although not for the expressed purpose of volunteering to assist with school or classroom activities. In response to other questions, many parents said they sometimes just stopped by their child's school to see how they were doing. Many parents also attended school events in which their child was participating, such as a play, sporting event, or concert. Parents of Minneapolis choice students were the most likely to attend a school event, whether their child was participating or not.

When asked how their level of involvement with their child's current school compared to their involvement in their child's previous school, suburban choice and Minneapolis choice parents were evenly split in their responses (see Table 2.21). About one third of parents said they were more involved in their child's current school, one third was less involved, and one third said their involvement was about the same. When asked if they would like to have been more involved with their child's school, close to 80% or more of parents in each group said yes (see Table 2.22).

Table 2.20. Parent involvement with child's school.

During this most recent school year, did you go to your child's school...	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
...for a parent-teacher conference	86.8	91.1	91.8	.334	2
...for an informal talk with a teacher or principal	86.7%	85.5%	76.1%	.045*	2
...to visit your child's school or classrooms	75.7	83.9	80.7	.252	2
...to help in your child's classroom	32.4	36.3	25.9	.191	2
...to volunteer for a school project or trip	34.6	36.3	25.9	.155	2
...to attend a school event in which your child participated, such as a play, sporting event, or concert	72.1	79.8	63.7	.016*	2
...to attend family night, for example, to watch movies or go skating	40.0	45.9	42.2	.630	2
...to attend some other school event with your child	50.4	63.4	46.7	.019*	2

*p<=.05

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q19.

Table 2.21. Level of involvement with child's current school compared to previous school.

	Participants		Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=123)	Minneapolis Choice (n=108)	Chi-sq.	d.f.
More involved	35.8%	37.0%	.849	2
About the same amount	35.0	37.0		
Less involved	29.3	25.9		

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q24.

Table 2.22. Parents' interest in increasing school involvement

	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=133)	Minneapolis Choice (n=122)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Would liked to have been more involved with child's school	78.2%	85.2%	85.2%	.219	2

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q26.

The most commonly reported barrier to parental involvement across all three parent groups was lack of time (see Table 2.23). For parents of non-participating students, lack of daycare, lack of transportation, the distance of the school from home, and language barriers were also mentioned as inhibiting parent involvement for roughly 1 out of 4 of these parents. Some parents also mentioned that because their own experiences as a student were not that positive, it was more difficult for them to return to school with their own child.

Table 2.23. Barriers to parent involvement at child's school.

	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Lack of time	62.5%	66.7%	74.1%	.119	2
Lack of daycare	12.6	20.2	28.6	.005**	2
Lack of transportation	13.2	32.3	29.6	.001***	2
Distance from home to school	21.3	27.4	25.9	.489	2
English not first language	7.4	13.7	23.0	.001***	2
Negative school experience when parent was a student	8.3	4.9	11.3	.177	2
Poor health	3.7	7.3	3.7	.306	2
Other responsibilities	0.7	1.6	0.0	.328	2

p<=.01, *p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q25.

In general, parents in all three groups were satisfied with the opportunities for them to be involved with their child's current school with parents of Minneapolis choice and non-participating students expressing the highest levels of satisfaction (94% and 92%, respectively) (see Table 2.24). Despite the comparable levels of involvement across groups, suburban choice parents were the least interested in being *more* involved and only 84% expressed satisfaction with the opportunities for them to be involved with their child's school.

Parent Involvement at Home

Another way even busy parents may be involved in their child's education in a significant way is by regularly checking in with their child about school. Almost all parents said they talked with their child about school at least once a week. Eighty percent or more of parents of suburban choice and Minneapolis choice students talked with their child about school on a daily basis, as compared to 69% of parents of non-participating students (see Table 2.25).

Table 2.24. Parent satisfaction with opportunities for parent involvement at child's current school.

	Participants					Eligible, Non-participants (n= 135)		Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n= 136)		Minneapolis Choice (n= 124)						
	Percent								
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Chi- sq.	d.f.	
How satisfied were you with your opportunities to be involved with your child’s school?	53.3	30.4	68.6	25.6	61.1	31.3	.067	6	

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q27.

Table 2.25. Frequency with which an adult talked with child about school

	Choosers		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=135)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Every day	83.0%	80.6%	68.9%	.064	4
At least once a week	15.6	16.9	27.4		
Once or twice a month	1.5	2.4	3.7		
Less often	0.0	0.0	0.0		

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q28

Home-School Communication

In addition to the less frequent face-to-face contact with parents, schools regularly attempt to communicate with parents by telephone, student report cards, and other information sent to the home. For the most part, parents of suburban choice, Minneapolis choice, and non-participating students agreed that their child's school was effective in communicating with them (see Table 2.26). Across the groups, over 85% of parents felt their child's school communicated in a timely manner about problems or needs their child might be experiences. Over 90% of parents felt that student progress reports were informative.

Table 2.26. Parent perceptions of home-school communication.

	Participants				Eligible, Non-participants (n= 135)		Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n= 136)		Minneapolis Choice (n= 124)					
	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	Chi- sq.	d.f.
Child’s school contacted you right away about your child’s needs or problems.	43.3	41.8	48.4	41.8	40.2	47.0	.804	6
Student report cards and other progress reports were informative.	39.6	51.5	44.6	47.9	44.4	46.6	.940	6

When asked how the amount of contact they had with their child's current school compared to the contact they had with their child's previous school, 43% of suburban choice parents and 38% of Minneapolis choice parents said they had *more* contact with the current school; fewer than 25% of parents in both groups said the amount of contact was *less* (see Table 2.27)

Table 2.27. Amount of contact with child's current school as compared to previous school.

	Participants		Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=122)	Minneapolis Choice (n=105)	Chi-sq.	d.f.
More contact	43.4%	38.1%	.591	2
About the same amount	33.6	40.0		
Less contact	23.0	21.9		

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q20.

The primary reason for contact with the current school was most often related to the child's academic performance. This was true for 65% of suburban choice parents, 58% of Minneapolis choice parents, and 51% of non-participating parents (see Table 2.28). Needing to talk about the student's behavior was the main purpose of contact for 21% of suburban choice parents, 28% of Minneapolis choice parents, and 30% of non-participating parents. Finally, exchanging general information between parents and schools was given as the primary reason for contact by 16% of suburban choice parents, 27% of Minneapolis choice, and 31% of non-participating parents.

Table 2.28. Primary reason for contact with child's current school.

	Participants		Eligible, Non- participants (n=130)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=133)	Minneapolis Choice (n=120)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Academic performance	60.2%	49.2%	41.5%	.266	10
Behavior	15.8	19.2	20.8		
General info	11.3	18.3	21.5		
All of the above	5.3	8.3	9.2		
Student activities	3.0	2.5	2.3		
Other	4.5	2.5	4.6		

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q21.

Across the three groups parents were generally satisfied with the ways in which their child's school communicated with them and the frequency of contact, with 83% to 92% expressing satisfaction (see Table 2.29). As was true of parents' satisfaction with opportunities for parent involvement, the level of satisfaction with the methods and frequency of home-school communication among Minneapolis choice and non-participating parents was somewhat higher than that of suburban choice parents.

Table 2.29. Parent satisfaction with home-school communication at child's current school.

	Participants						Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n= 136)		Minneapolis Choice (n= 124)		Eligible, Non-participants (n= 135)			
	Percent						Chi-sq.	d.f.
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied		
How satisfied were you with the <u>ways</u> your child’s school communicated with you?	61.5	21.5	65.0	26.8	61.7	26.3	.514	6
How satisfied were you with <u>how often</u> your child’s school communicated with you?	53.7	30.6	66.1	24.8	56.1	31.8	.331	6

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q22, Q23.

Satisfaction with Current Choice

Parents' satisfaction with a particular school is evident in whether they would make the same choice again and whether they would recommend the school to other parents. When suburban choice, Minneapolis choice, and non-participating parents were asked if they had to do it over would they choose their child's current school again for this particular child, many parents would make the same choice (see Table 2.30). Parents of students participating in *The Choice Is Yours* – both in the suburban choice and Minneapolis choice schools – were most likely to enroll their child in the same school again (4 out of 5 parents). Parents of students who were also attending the suburban choice schools but not enrolled under *The Choice Is Yours* program (ineligible students) – were less likely to choose the same school again (3 out of 4) with some parents expressing uncertainty about the decision. Parents of students who remained in Minneapolis schools but did not enroll in a Minneapolis choice school (eligible, non-participants) were also less likely to choose the same school again for their child (3 out of 4 parents).

Parents' reasons for choosing the same school again reflected their primary reason for selecting it in the first place: academic quality (see Table 2.33). Having now experienced the school, some parents also cited a positive school climate (particularly in the suburban choice and Minneapolis choice schools) and their child's preference to stay in the school. Parents would not choose the school again when they felt it was “not a good school” or generally “not meeting the needs of their child”.

Table 2.30. Parent would choose same school again for this child.

	Sample				Significance	
	Suburban Choice Schools		Minneapolis Choice Schools	Eligible, Non-participants		
	Participants (n=136)	Not eligible (n=155)	Participants (n=124)	(n=135)	Chi-sq	d.f.
Yes	83.1%	74.2%	81.5%	74.1%	.001***	6
No	14.7	9.7	10.5	18.5		
Don't know	2.2	16.1	8.1	7.4		

Notes: ¹ Non-participants under suburban choice schools represent parents of students who were not eligible to enroll in *The Choice Is Yours* program because they were not a resident of Minneapolis and eligible for free or reduced price lunches. Most are likely parents of students who residents of the suburban district or other open-enrolled students.

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q34; 2003 Parent Survey, Q3

As noted in Table 2.31, when parents were asked if they would recommend their child's current school to others, parents whose child was participating in *The Choice Is Yours* were more likely to say they would do so (88% suburban choice and 92% Minneapolis choice). In

fact, 53% of suburban choice parents and 60% of Minneapolis choice parents had *already* recommended their child’s school to someone else. In contrast, only 76% of parents whose child was also attending a suburban choice school but not through *The Choice Is Yours* program (non-Minneapolis residents and therefore ineligible students) would recommend their child’s school to others. Similarly, parents of students who remained in Minneapolis schools but did not enroll in a Minneapolis choice school (eligible, non-participants) were also less likely to recommend the school to others (79%). Parents reasons for recommending the school again centered on academic quality and a positive school climate (see Table 2.34).

Table 2.31. Parent would recommend child’s school to others.

	Sample				Significance	
	Suburban Choice Schools		Minneapolis Choice Schools	Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)		
	Participants (n=136)	Not Eligible (n=155)	Participants (n=124)		Chi-sq	d.f.
Yes, would recommend	34.6%	63.9%	32.3%	45.9%	.000***	9
Yes, already have	53.7	12.3	59.7	32.6		
No, would not	11.0	6.5	5.6	14.8		
Don’t know	0.7	17.4	2.4	6.7		

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q35; 2003 Parent Survey, Q4

When parents of students participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program – that is, the 66% who were aware that their child was enrolled in the program²⁰ – were asked if they would recommend the program to others, virtually every parent said yes with two-thirds already having done so (see Table 2.32). Parents said they would recommend *The Choice Is Yours* program to other parents looking for better educational opportunities for their child (see Table 2.35).

²⁰In the discussion of school choice that began the section on parent perspectives, it was noted that very few parents of Minneapolis choice students had heard of *The Choice Is Yours* program by name and even fewer were aware that their child was participating in the program. Even suburban choice parents did not all recognize the program by name or realize that their child was enrolled under the program.

Table 2.32. Parents would recommend *The Choice is Yours* program to others.¹

	Participants		Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=88)	Minneapolis Choice (n=4)	Chi-sq.	d.f.
Yes, would recommend	35.2%	1 of 4	.888	2
Yes, already have	63.6	3 of 4		
No, would not recommend	1.1	0 of 4		

Note: ¹ Only asked of those respondents who had heard of the Choice is Yours program *and* had a child enrolled in the program in 2002-03.

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q36

Table 2.33. Reasons parents would choose current school again.

	Suburban Choice Schools		Minneapolis Choice Schools	Eligible, Non-participants (n=122)	Sample Comments
	Participants (n=132)	Not Eligible (n=75)	Participants (n=114)		
Quality education	18.9%	25.3%	14.0%	14.8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “They’ve had high standards, she’s met them, and they continue to reinforce confidence in your work and yourself.”
Quality teaching staff	13.6	16.0	18.4	19.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I like the teachers... they gave her what she needed and they helped her grow each year.” “Most of the teachers seem caring and competent.”
Good school/reputation	23.5	9.3	21.9	19.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I think it’s one of the greatest schools in the state.” “Because I like the school and I like the people I came in contact with.”
Curriculum offerings	5.3	9.3	4.4	4.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The kids have many options like the Spanish, music, and fine arts.”
Academic Quality	61.3%	59.9%	58.7%	59.1%	
Positive learning environment	22.0	16.0	15.8	6.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The school made us feel at home.” “When you walk in, they know who you are and they know your kids.”
Student preference	12.9	2.7	8.8	8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “She loves the school and can’t wait to go back. She is so involved and is in her element.” “My child loves this school and the students and the families of the students.”
Home-school communication	7.6	1.3	7.0	5.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “If there are any concerns, teachers notify me and talk to me.”
Student support services	2.3	8.0	7.9	4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I like the programs they have to accommodate various children with different needs.”
Location	4.6	4.0	3.5	8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Because of the distance. If they miss the bus, I can walk them [to school].”

Note: ¹ Parents could offer more than one reason for their decision.

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q34a.

Table 2.34. Reasons parents would recommend child's current school to others.

	Suburban Choice Schools		Minneapolis Choice Schools	Eligible, Non-participants (n=121)	Sample Comments
	Participants (n=124)	Not Eligible (n=56)	Participants (n=119)		
Quality education	25.0%	28.6%	13.4%	8.3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "They have a higher standard and give grades that students deserve." ▪ "They are providing an excellent education for kids."
Quality teaching staff	12.1	19.6	25.2	19.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "I like their approach to teaching and the way they treat the kids." ▪ "They really teach the children how to think and make them want to learn."
Good school/reputation	23.4	17.9%	24.4	24.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Because we had a wonderful experience with this school." ▪ "I like the school because my children are responding pretty positively."
Curriculum offerings	9.7	8.9	10.1	9.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "They teach students about computers, different languages, instruments." ▪ "I like all the options the kids have to choose from."
Academic Quality	70.2%	75.0%	73.1%	61.2%	
Positive learning environment	16.9	12.5	22.7	11.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Because they are not racist and they are very fair to every kid." ▪ "Everyone is treated warmly and fairly. It's a beautiful environment."

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q35a.

Table 2.35. Reasons parents would recommend *The Choice Is Yours* program to other people.

	Participants		Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=88)	Minneapolis Choice (n=3)	
Improvement over/change from previous district	50.0	0 of 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “It is a unique opportunity for the kids and the families who had some issues with the schools in their own districts.” ▪ “I think it’s important for people who live in disadvantaged communities to give their children the opportunity to be involved in a more advantaged community. I think it’s important for kids who live in poverty to see what it’s like to be in a community that’s not in poverty.”
Ability to choose school	35.2%	3 of 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because I’m glad that I had the choice to send my children to another school that I felt they deserved.” ▪ “It gives people in the city a greater choice in their kid’s education.” ▪ “It’s very good to pick your own school—you don’t feel limited to the city boundaries.”
Transportation available	9.1	0 of 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because it really helps out, especially work-wise. I would have had to take them to school, but now they are bused.”

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q36a.

Section 3: School Responsiveness

This section summarizes the results of data gathered on the responsiveness of *The Choice Is Yours* schools in meeting the needs of students participating in the program. It includes information gathered from program staff, district representatives, parents, and teachers on how students were recruited and welcomed, perceptions of racial climate in the schools, and how well these schools are meeting the needs of diverse student populations.

Evaluation Topics and Guiding Questions: School Responsiveness

11. How have suburban and magnet-receiving schools recruited and welcomed students participating in the inter-district transfer program?
12. What are the levels and types of home-school-community activities with which families participating in the inter-district transfer program may be involved?
13. What is the racial climate in the suburban and magnet schools?
14. What types of programs have schools implemented to address diversity?

Data sources: 380 school climate surveys completed by teachers at suburban choice schools and 123 by teachers at Minneapolis choice magnet schools; Interviews with WMEP Steering Committee members and the CIY Family Liaison; and District desegregation plans

Also included in this section are parent perspectives:

8. How do schools recruit and welcome inter-district transfer program participants? (parent)
9. What are inter-district transfer program parent perceptions of the racial climate in the schools and how does this compare to other parent perceptions? (parent)
10. According to parents, in what ways are schools addressing the needs of diverse students? (parent)

Outreach for *The Choice Is Yours* Program

According to the settlement, the State of Minnesota through the Minnesota Department of Education was required to “disseminate information in multiple languages to parents” regarding the suburban choice and Minneapolis choice options offered through *The Choice Is Yours* program. In the process, the state was required to use a variety of outreach strategies. This section describes the outreach activities that were led by the state during the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Although the state worked closely with all of the project partners in developing and implementing these outreach efforts, the primary responsibility for outreach, as specified in the settlement, rested with the state. The focus of the state’s outreach efforts was on informing parents of *all of their school choice options*.

Since the inception of *The Choice Is Yours* program, a variety of outreach materials have been developed and disseminated to prospective parents through community events, in response to inquiries at participating school districts, and through other targeted outreach efforts.

- A school choice video for use at presentations was created during the program's first year. A brand new video was created during the second year of the program and is available in the four primary languages of Minneapolis families, including English. A public service announcement was also produced in the first year.
- Brochures describing the schools and districts participating in *The Choice Is Yours* suburban choice program were created in the program's first year and updated the following year. The brochures were prepared in multiple languages – English, Lao, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish – and disseminated throughout the project at various events and targeted outreach efforts. Thousands of language appropriate brochures were distributed to key populations through targeted outreach efforts that included a direct mailing to all Kindergarten through second grade students in the Minneapolis Public Schools and sending international versions of the brochures home to all students in the Minneapolis Public Schools whose home language was Spanish, Hmong, Somali, or Lao regardless of grade level.
- A camera-ready worship bulletin insert was also created that communities of faith could duplicate on their own and insert into bulletins.
- The Minnesota Department of Education created a dedicated website for *The Choice Is Yours* describing the suburban and Minneapolis choice options available under the program.

Outreach for choice options under *The Choice Is Yours* each year also utilized the media. Information on school choice was disseminated through many media outlets, especially ones targeting communities of color, including radio stations and community newspapers. In addition to receiving coverage in the minority newspapers and the two major metropolitan daily newspapers, the program also purchased advertisements in the minority papers. During the first year of the program, the public service announcement was distributed to all broadcast stations in the Twin Cities. Broadcast news coverage was also provided on evening newscasts (6 and 10 pm), including live coverage at one of the outreach suppers. Initial outreach efforts also included the purchase of ads in bus shelters in targeted Minneapolis neighborhoods.

Special services provided prospective and participating parents with person-to-person support.

- When the program was first implemented, The Minnesota Department of Education began hosting *The Choice Is Yours* information hotline offering information by telephone to families with interpreters available as needed.
- The West Metro Education Program established a Family and Community Liaison position to enhance outreach efforts and provide support to participating families. This position began during the first year of the program.
- Each suburban choice district also has at least one staff member who is responsible for coordinating *The Choice Is Yours* program within the district, including fielding calls from prospective parents, supporting parents who have applied through the registration process, and working with participating schools to address any needs that arise with participating families.

Several events allowed prospective parents to meet one-on-one with parents of children already enrolled in the suburban choice schools through *The Choice Is Yours*, with representatives from participating districts (suburban and Minneapolis), and with staff from *The Choice Is Yours* program. Such events included language interpreters to better meet the needs of Spanish, Somali, Lao, and Hmong families. After the events, the districts followed up with prospective parents by telephone, often scheduling school visits to allow parents to tour the facilities, talk with school administrators, and obtain additional information about the school's curriculum and other features. In some cases, the districts covered the cost of transportation for parents to visit a school. Community outreach events included the following:

- Annual school choice fairs for Minneapolis families that included booths for the suburban choice districts.
- Free school choice outreach suppers in Minneapolis neighborhoods each year.
- Other parent information meetings held at various community organizations. Meetings were sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Education with representatives from suburban districts present to talk with parents.

An informal word-of-mouth campaign was supported in every suburban choice district. Parents of children already enrolled in *The Choice Is Yours* program were encouraged to share their experiences with other parents they felt would benefit from the program. Some districts even send a letter to participating parents encouraging them to refer friends, relatives, and neighbors to the program.

A number of new and existing partnerships and collaborations were also used to support suburban choice outreach efforts:

- PICA HeadStart, which provides HeadStart to low-income families in Minneapolis, distributed materials, offered school tours and conducted outreach events. PICA HeadStart provided buses to allow parents of entering kindergartners the opportunity to visit a sampling of the types of schools available to their children and distributed informational materials through outreach events and other means.
- The Greater Minneapolis Daycare Association mailed publicity to all of their programs, who in turn ordered bulk quantities of materials to distribute to families.
- Partnership for Choice in Education, a Minnesota non-profit, hosted school tours which the Minnesota Department of Education helped to promote.
- The West Metro Education Program (WMEP) Steering Committee and WMEP Joint Powers Board, which includes superintendents and a school board member for each of the member districts, oversaw the involvement of participating school districts.

How Suburban Choice Parents Heard About the Program

Despite a lack of name recognition for the program which hampered efforts to determine the extent to which all parents were aware of *The Choice Is Yours* program, the use of a variety of outreach activities seemed to be an effective strategy to the extent that suburban choice

parents heard about the program in a multitude of ways. As noted earlier, parents of suburban choice students said they had heard about *The Choice Is Yours* program from a friend, relative, or neighbor (35%), former school or district (28%), materials about the program which may have been mailed home to parents or picked up at another location (20%), through newspaper or television media (18%), or from a community organization (13%) (see previous section on “Parents’ Reasons for Choice”).

Outreach vs. “Recruitment”

Early on in the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours* program it became clear in discussions among the state and district program representatives that while the transfer of students into suburban districts fulfilled the requirements of the legal settlement, this approach also had considerable fiscal implications for the sending district. Despite the state’s emphasis on informing families of *all of their choices*, the suburban choice districts struggled with the possibility that their involvement in the state’s outreach efforts, particularly in attracting students to their own district, might be construed as “active recruitment” on their part. (For further discussion of this important issue and its effect on program activities, see Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers.)

During the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program, there was also no intentional outreach to families on the part of the Minneapolis Public Schools regarding the availability of spaces in Minneapolis choice magnet school under the intra-district portion of the program. Instead, parents of students who were eligible to attend a Minneapolis choice magnet school through the program were simply assigned to the school if they submitted a school request form and met the eligibility requirements. In an effort to more accurately reflect the school choices available to Minneapolis families as they began applying to schools for the third year of *The Choice Is Yours*, the district’s school registration cards were redesigned to highlight the program as one option. During the second year of the project the Minneapolis Public Schools also conducted an advertising campaign in the print media targeting suburban families and the school choice options available to them within the urban district.

Welcoming Students

School Perspective

Since the beginning of *The Choice Is Yours* program, it was evident that all of the program partners – the suburban choice districts, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis NAACP, and the Minnesota Department of Education – wanted students who participated in the program to feel that they truly belonged at their new schools. Consequently, both the suburban districts and Minneapolis Public School district have made it a point to see that *The Choice Is Yours* students were not singled out or segregated from other students because of their participation in the program and that they had the same access to opportunities available to any student enrolled in these school districts.

Like any student new to these districts, *The Choice Is Yours* students are invited to attend new student orientations and, in some districts, receive a call from their new principal welcoming them to the school. Similarly, “welcome nights” held at each school introduce all students to the staff and begin to create a sense of community. Each school also has one or more staff members whose role it is to assist new students in getting registered for classes and making the transition to the school; this is generally the school secretary and principal at the elementary school level and a guidance counselor or dean of students at the secondary level.

In some instances, the suburban districts have made special arrangements to ensure that *The Choice Is Yours* students have the same opportunities to participate as other students enrolled in the suburban choice schools. In addition to receiving welcome/informational letters from the district’s *The Choice Is Yours* program coordinator, families participating in the program are generally invited to meet with school and district staff members to raise any questions they might have about transportation and other issues. Some districts have made this informational session into a family picnic as a way for *The Choice Is Yours* families to meet and get to know one another. When transportation has presented a barrier to participation at any function, suburban choice districts have made special arrangements for *The Choice Is Yours* students to attend.

Parent and Student Perspectives

In the telephone interviews, both parents of suburban choice and Minneapolis choice students said they felt welcome at their child’s school and that they were treated with respect and courtesy by the school staff (see discussion of school climate below). Moreover, suburban choice and Minneapolis choice parents felt that their child’s school welcomed cultural diversity and had a strong sense of community and pride.

Parents of suburban choice students were also asked if they knew of anything their child’s school did to make their child feel welcome. While their responses highlighted some of the strategies mentioned earlier – such as new student orientations and open houses – for the most part, these parents commented on the willingness of school staff to assist their child in any way (see Table 3.1). In general, parents felt that staff members at the school genuinely cared about their child’s well-being (see Table 3.2 and school climate discussion below). In focus groups conducted with *The Choice Is Yours* students attending suburban schools, the vast majority of students echoed their parents’ sentiments saying that teachers, administrators and other students made them feel welcome at their new school (see Student Experiences).

Table 3.1: Parents views of how suburban choice schools welcomed students.

	Percent (n=82)	Sample Comments
Positive environment / student treated well by others	43.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They made sure if he had any problems they talked about it and let him know they were on his side.” ▪ “The principal would call him and said if you need anything just to call.” ▪ “The principal knows every child by name—she's awesome.” ▪ “She’s always been treated well there. Everyone’s always been warm and welcoming.”
Supportive teaching staff	14.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “His teacher was really kind to him and welcomed him even though he was unsure about being in school.” ▪ “The teachers and teachers’ aides let her know that if she has any issues or questions, she can come to them, and they never said ‘later’.”
Orientations/open houses/tours	14.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “There was a meet and greet with a teacher and that made him excited to be there.” ▪ “They had a sort of a welcoming for the new students so they could kind of network, and they had a couple of events throughout the year to get those students back together.”
Provided additional support to meet students’ needs	13.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Counselors always had their door open to her; they helped her work her problems out.” ▪ “They accommodated his IEP and introduced him to other children.”
Supported participation in extracurricular activities	8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They encouraged her to get more involved with different organizations within the school.” ▪ “They encouraged her to do extracurricular activities to meet more people.” ▪ “They made sure that my daughter participated with special events.”

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q33a

School Climate

Climate in Suburban Choice Schools – Parent Perspective

Parents of students attending suburban choice schools – both parents of students participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program and parents of students attending the same suburban schools

but not eligible to participate in the program²¹ (non-participants) – were asked to rate their school’s climate. Overall, parents of participating students gave their suburban schools a rating of “good” on virtually every item,²² agreeing that the school offered a culture and climate that was supportive of student learning (see Table 3.2). Parents of non-participating students in suburban choice schools were somewhat less favorable in their ratings with only 6 of 14 items receiving ratings equivalent to “good”. Almost every item, however, in both groups received a rating of at least a 3 on a scale of 1 to 4, suggesting relatively high levels of agreement with these statements about school climate. Of the two groups, parents of *The Choice Is Yours* students tended to give the higher ratings.

Both parents of participants and non-participants agreed that the suburban choice schools provided a safe learning environment in which all students were held to high standards. Moreover, both groups of parents agreed that the suburban schools welcomed cultural diversity and felt that the teachers in these schools were comfortable talking about racism and prejudice. Parents in each group also felt welcome at their child’s school and that they were treated with respect by the school staff.

Despite the positive ratings overall, some differences were still noted between parents of participants and non-participants. For example, parents of students in *The Choice Is Yours* program were even more likely to agree that the school set high standards for achievement and to believe that teachers held high expectations for their child. Understandably, these same parents were also more likely to agree that the school was preparing their child to succeed academically and to appreciate differences in others. Given that a key reason why so many of *The Choice Is Yours* students enrolled in suburban choice schools was to acquire a higher quality education than they were receiving at their previous school, their perceptions of academic quality at the suburban school might be somewhat inflated by this comparison.

With regard to school rules and expectations for behavior, again there were differences between parents of students participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program and parents of non-participants. In this instance, parents of students in the program were more likely to agree that the rules and expectations for behavior were clear, enforced, and administered fairly. Parents of suburban students who were attending the school but not enrolled in *The Choice Is Yours* program, in particular, felt that such rules and expectations were not administered fairly. Taken together, these results may suggest differential perceptions of discipline, particularly in how it is administered. Data from focus groups with *The Choice Is Yours* students attending suburban choice schools support this finding, though *neither* the parent data nor the focus group data suggest differential treatment with regard to discipline as a prominent issue.

²¹ Non-participants in the suburban choice schools may have included students who were residents of Minneapolis but not eligible to enroll in *The Choice Is Yours* program along with other students who were residents of the suburban school district or open enrolling from yet another suburban district.

²² In national studies of school climate, item means of 3.2 to 3.5 are generally considered “good” ratings.

Table 3.2. Parent perceptions of school climate in suburban choice schools.

	Suburban Choice			
	Participant (n=136)		Non-participant (n=155)	
	Mean ¹	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
a. The school set high standards for achievement.	3.43**	.70	3.20	.63
b. The school had a strong sense of community and pride.	3.45	.74	3.35	.62
c. The rules and expectations for student behavior were CLEAR.	3.53***	.66	3.22	.66
d. The rules and expectations for student behavior were ENFORCED.	3.44***	.70	3.03	.72
e. The rules and expectations for student behavior were administered FAIRLY.	3.26***	.81	2.95	.75
f. The school provided a physically safe learning environment.	3.50***	.65	3.11	.66
g. The school welcomed cultural diversity.	3.31	.75	3.25	.61
h. Teachers at the school held high expectations for your child.	3.44***	.64	3.13	.71
i. Teachers at the school were comfortable talking about racism and prejudice.	3.08	.89	3.09	.59
j. Staff members at the school genuinely cared about your child's well-being.	3.34	.70	3.19	.78
k. You felt welcome at your child's school.	3.40	.68	3.31	.69
l. As a parent, you were treated with respect and courtesy by school staff.	3.41	.67	3.37	.70
m. The school was preparing your child to succeed academically.	3.39**	.71	3.18	.69
n. The school was teaching your child to appreciate differences in others.	3.41***	.70	3.11	.55

p<=.01, *p<=.001

Note: ¹ Based on a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q29

Climate in Suburban Choice Schools – Teacher Perspective

Teachers in the suburban choice schools were also asked to rate their school's climate on a set of more general items, very similar to those rated by parents. While teachers in these schools tended to give fewer "good" ratings (only 6 of 14 items),²³ most items received least a 3 on a scale of 1 to 4, suggesting relatively high levels of agreement with these statements about school climate (see Table 3.3). Teachers believed that their suburban choice school offered a culture and climate that was supportive of student learning and that their schools

²³ In national studies of school climate, item means of 3.2 to 3.5 are generally considered "good" ratings.

provided a safe learning environment in which all students were held to high standards and parent involvement was encouraged. Finally, suburban choice teachers agreed that the goals and priorities for their schools were clear and shared by their colleagues, and identified a high degree of cooperation among the teaching staff.

Teachers at suburban choice schools were not in complete agreement with parents, however, on issues related to student behavior and discipline. While teachers and parents agreed that the rules and expectations for student behavior were clear, many teachers did not feel that they were enforced or administered fairly (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Teacher perceptions of general school climate in suburban choice schools.

	Suburban Choice Schools		
	N	Mean ¹	S.D.
a. The goals and priorities for my school are clear.	379	3.22	.66
b. The goals and priorities for my school are shared by most of my colleagues.	379	3.07	.63
c. My school sets high standards for achievement.	375	3.43	.65
d. My school has a strong sense of community and pride.	377	3.32	.74
e. The rules and expectations for student behavior are CLEAR.	378	3.01	.82
f. The rules and expectations for student behavior are ENFORCED.	379	2.74	.84
g. The rules and expectations for student behavior are administered FAIRLY.	377	2.97	.79
h. My school provides a physically safe learning environment.	378	3.36	.64
i. My school welcomes cultural diversity.	377	3.41	.63
j. My school encourages parent participation.	379	3.52	.59
k. Teachers at my school hold high expectations for ALL students.	379	3.15	.72
l. There is a great deal of cooperative effort among members of the teaching staff.	378	3.06	.77
2j. My school is preparing all students to succeed academically.	377	2.98	.68
2k. My school is preparing all students to appreciate differences in others.	375	3.03	.64

Note: ¹ Based on a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q1 and Q2.

While parents and teachers did agree that the suburban choice schools welcomed cultural diversity (see Table 3.3), teachers disagreed with parents who felt that the teachers in these schools *were comfortable* talking about racism and prejudice (see Table 3.4 on next page). Teachers were also less certain than parents that the suburban choice schools were preparing all students to succeed academically and to appreciate differences in others.

Teachers were also asked to rate an additional set of school climate items related to diversity. Teachers at the suburban choice schools felt that the teaching staff and people in leadership roles did not reflect the diversity of the school's student population (see Table 3.4). They also agreed that the students at their school were not taught about different races and cultures. When asked how students of different cultures interacted at their school, teachers felt that

students were less likely to make friends with students of different races and noted that students tended to group themselves with students of the same race during unstructured time. Teachers also said that students of different races generally did not work well together in their school. Taken together, these results suggest that these suburban choice schools are in the very early stages of providing integrated learning environments, both in terms of staffing that reflects student diversity and greater integration among students.

Table 3.4. Teacher perceptions of school climate with regard to diversity in suburban choice schools.

	Suburban Choice Schools		
	N	Mean ¹	S.D.
1m. The diversity of the teaching staff reflects the diversity of the student population.	375	2.09	.80
1n. The diversity of the people in leadership roles reflects the diversity of the student population.	375	2.10	.80
2a. Students at my school show respect for teachers.	377	2.84	.65
2b. Students of different races work well together at my school.	373	2.93	.59
2c. Students are taught about different cultures and races at my school.	367	2.99	.63
2d. During unstructured time, such as lunch, students tend to group themselves with students of the same race.	360	2.77	.74
2e. Students make friends with students of different racial groups.	375	2.98	.49
2f. Teachers at my school are comfortable talking about the negative impact of racism and prejudice.	365	2.96	.64

Note: ¹ Based on a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q1 and Q2.

When asked to characterize the changes in their school's climate in the past two years – that is, since *The Choice Is Yours* program was instituted – 40% of teachers in suburban choice schools said their school climate had stayed the same, 36% said it had gotten worse, and 23% said it had improved (see Table 3.5). Asked why they thought these improvements had occurred, teachers at suburban choice schools cited better school administration / leadership, and increased collegiality among staff (see Table 3.11). Reasons for a worsening climate in these suburban schools were attributed primarily to ineffective mechanisms for dealing with inappropriate student behavior, administrative turnover or ineffective leadership, and teachers' inability to keep up with the challenges presented by an increasingly diverse student body.

Table 3.5: Teacher perceptions of changes in school climate in suburban choice schools in the past two years.

	Suburban Choice Schools
Better	23.0 %
Worse	35.5
About the same	41.5

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q5 (n=352).

Minneapolis Choice Schools – Parent Perceptions

Parents of students attending Minneapolis choice schools – both parents of students identified as enrolled under *The Choice Is Yours* program and parents of other students attending the same Minneapolis magnet schools – were also asked to rate their school’s climate. Overall, parents of participating and non-participating students both gave their Minneapolis choice magnet schools “good” ratings on virtually every item,²⁴ agreeing that the schools offered a culture and climate that was supportive of student learning (see Table 3.6).

Both parents of participants and non-participants agreed that the Minneapolis choice schools provided a safe learning environment in which all students were held to high standards. Both groups of parents also felt that the school was preparing their child to succeed academically.

On the three items related to diversity, both groups of parents agreed that the Minneapolis choice schools welcomed cultural diversity, that the teachers in these schools were comfortable talking about racism and prejudice, and that the school was preparing their child to appreciate differences in others.

With regard to school rules and expectations for behavior, parents of students participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program and parents of non-participants were in agreement. Both groups of parents agreed that the rules and expectations for behavior were clear, enforced, and administered fairly. They also felt welcome at their child’s magnet school and felt that they were treated with respect by the school staff.

²⁴ In national studies of school climate, item means of 3.2 to 3.5 are generally considered “good” ratings.

Table 3.6. Parent perceptions of school climate in Minneapolis choice schools.

	Minneapolis Choice			
	Participant (n=123)		Non-participant (n=135)	
	Mean ¹	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
a. The school set high standards for achievement.	3.39	.69	3.41	.59
b. The school had a strong sense of community and pride.	3.47	.62	3.54	.62
c. The rules and expectations for student behavior were CLEAR.	3.39	.62	3.47	.63
d. The rules and expectations for student behavior were ENFORCED.	3.27	.70	3.33	.65
e. The rules and expectations for student behavior were administered FAIRLY.	3.26	.76	3.25	.63
f. The school provided a physically safe learning environment.	3.46	.62	3.46	.62
g. The school welcomed cultural diversity.	3.50**	.62	3.69	.49
h. Teachers at the school held high expectations for your child.	3.44	.68	3.36	.70
i. Teachers at the school were comfortable talking about racism and prejudice.	3.13*	.81	3.36	.66
j. Staff members at the school genuinely cared about your child's well-being.	3.48	.64	3.54	.63
k. You felt welcome at your child's school.	3.52	.55	3.60	.60
l. As a parent, you were treated with respect and courtesy by school staff.	3.52	.53	3.54	.56
m. The school was preparing your child to succeed academically.	3.40	.65	3.36	.69
n. The school was teaching your child to appreciate differences in others.	3.40*	.54	3.54	.53

*p<=.05, **p<=.01

Note: ¹ Based on a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q29.

Climate in Minneapolis Choice Schools – Teacher Perspective

Teachers in the Minneapolis choice schools were also asked to rate their school's climate. Like parents of Minneapolis choice students, teachers gave their school "good" ratings on most of the general items,²⁵ agreeing that the school offered a culture and climate that was supportive of student learning (see Table 3.7). Teachers agreed that the Minneapolis choice

²⁵ In national studies of school climate, item means of 3.2 to 3.5 are generally considered "good" ratings.

schools provided a safe learning environment in which all students were held to high standards and parent involvement was encouraged. Minneapolis choice teachers also agree that the goals and priorities for their schools were clear and shared by their colleagues, and identified a high degree of cooperation among the teaching staff.

Teachers at the Minneapolis choice schools agreed, in part, with parents on issues related to student behavior and discipline. Teachers and parents agreed that the rules and expectations for student behavior were clear and administered fairly, although teachers felt that they were not enforced (see Table 3.7).

At the Minneapolis choice schools, both parents and teachers agreed that their schools welcomed cultural diversity (see Table 3.7) and that the teachers in these schools were comfortable talking about racism and prejudice (see Table 3.8). Both also agreed that the Minneapolis choice schools were preparing all students to succeed academically and to appreciate differences in others.

Table 3.7. Teacher perceptions of school climate in Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

	Minneapolis Choice Magnet Schools		
	N	Mean ¹	S.D.
1a. The goals and priorities for my school are clear.	121	3.43	.64
1b. The goals and priorities for my school are shared by most of my colleagues.	122	3.29	.64
1c. My school sets high standards for achievement.	122	3.48	.67
1d. My school has a strong sense of community and pride.	123	3.34	.74
1e. The rules and expectations for student behavior are CLEAR.	123	3.23	.82
1f. The rules and expectations for student behavior are ENFORCED.	123	2.88	.87
1g. The rules and expectations for student behavior are administered FAIRLY.	123	3.02	.82
1h. My school provides a physically safe learning environment.	123	3.47	.68
1i. My school welcomes cultural diversity.	122	3.80	.46
1j. My school encourages parent participation.	123	3.73	.48
1k. Teachers at my school hold high expectations for ALL students.	123	3.39	.74
1l. There is a great deal of cooperative effort among members of the teaching staff.	122	3.11	.73
2j. My school is preparing all students to succeed academically.	122	3.16	.72
2k. My school is preparing all students to appreciate differences in others.	123	3.36	.57

Note: ¹ Based on a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q1.

Teachers were also asked to rate an additional set of school climate items related to diversity. Teachers at the Minneapolis choice schools felt that the teaching staff and people in leadership roles did not reflect the diversity of the school's student population (see Table 3.8). They did, however, agree that the students at their school were taught about different races and cultures. When asked how students of different cultures interacted at their school,

teachers said that students in the Minneapolis choice schools were likely to make friends with students of different races and that students of different races generally worked well together. Teachers did note that students tended to group themselves with students of the same race during unstructured time. Taken together, these results suggest that the Minneapolis choice schools have, to some extent, achieved integrated learning environments by way of promoting positive cross-cultural interactions among students. Like most schools, there is room for improvement in terms of staff who better reflect the diversity of their schools' student population.

Table 3.8. Teacher perceptions of school climate with regard to diversity in Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

	Minneapolis Choice Schools		
	N	Mean ¹	S.D.
1m. The diversity of the teaching staff reflects the diversity of the student population.	123	2.07	.77
1n. The diversity of the people in leadership roles reflects the diversity of the student population.	122	2.25	.87
2a. Students at my school show respect for teachers.	123	2.99	.74
2b. Students of different races work well together at my school.	122	3.33	.61
2c. Students are taught about different cultures and races at my school.	122	3.39	.55
2d. During unstructured time, such as lunch, students tend to group themselves with students of the same race.	118	2.48	.77
2e. Students make friends with students of different racial groups.	121	3.26	.54
2f. Teachers at my school are comfortable talking about the negative impact of racism and prejudice.	122	3.16	.68

Note: ¹ Based on a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q1 and Q2.

When asked to characterize the changes in their school's climate in the past two years – that is, since *The Choice Is Yours* program was instituted – 40% of teachers in Minneapolis choice schools said their school climate had stayed the same, 38% said it had gotten worse, and 23% said it had improved (see Table 3.9). Asked why they thought these improvements had occurred, teachers cited better school administration and leadership, increased collegiality among staff, and programming that supports teachers' work with diverse student populations (see Table 3.10). Reasons for a worsening climate in the Minneapolis choice schools was attributed primarily to administrative turnover or ineffective leadership, ineffective mechanism for dealing with inappropriate student behaviors, budget cuts, and teachers inability to keep up with the challenges presented by an increasingly diverse student body.

Table 3.9: Teacher perceptions of changes in school climate at Minneapolis choice magnet schools in the past two years.

	Minneapolis Choice Schools
Better	22.7%
Worse	37.8
About the same	39.5

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q5. (n=119)

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Students

In recent years, the suburban choice school districts have experienced an increase in enrollment by students of color. Although the percentage of minority students is well below 50% in most of the school districts, nonetheless, these school districts are beginning to experience the changes brought about by an increasingly diverse student population. As mentioned in the overview, the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) is a voluntary collaborative of one urban and nine suburban school districts formed in 1989 to cooperatively address integration issues in the west metro area. In line with the Minnesota Desegregation Rule, WMEP has prepared a Desegregation Plan to support voluntary integration in the west metropolitan school districts that include the racially-isolated Minneapolis Public Schools.

In support of the broader WMEP plan, which addresses cross-district integration issues, each of the participating suburban WMEP member districts prepared an “Action Plan” outlining key activities to occur within their school district. Figure 3.1 summarizes the key elements from the district-level desegregation plans for the eight suburban school districts participating in the inter-district transfer program under *The Choice Is Yours*. This summary highlights some of the more common ways in which these eight school districts are intentionally attending to issues of diversity and equity in the areas that include: offering training to staff; modifying curriculum and instruction to be more responsive to the needs of diverse learners; reviewing and revising policies; offering additional learning opportunities for students, families, and the community; providing transportation and other student support services; and generally engaging in outreach to support their schools and communities in addressing issues of diversity. This summary was prepared through a review of district’s Action Plans and interviews with district representatives.

School Preparedness - Parent Perspectives

Parents of students attending suburban choice and Minneapolis choice schools, as well as teachers at the schools, were asked to comment on how prepared their schools are to address the needs of racially, economically, and language diverse student populations.

When parents were asked if they felt their child’s school was prepared to meet the needs of students of different races and cultures, their responses indicated significant differences in perceptions of school preparedness (see Table 3.11). Parents of Minneapolis choice and non-participating students were most likely to characterize their schools as prepared to work with

racially diverse populations (84% and 78%, respectively). In contrast, only 66% of parents of suburban choice students felt their child's school was prepared in this way. Parents' reasons for believing that their school was prepared to deal with cultural diversity focused primarily on the fact that the student population was already very culturally diverse, examples of how the school celebrates diversity, and that parents did not see any evidence of discrimination but rather an emphasis on equality (see Table 3.15). Parents who felt their school was not prepared cited the self-segregation of students by cultural groups.

**Figure 3.1. How *The Choice Is Yours* Suburban School Districts
Are Addressing Issues of Diversity and Equity**

capacity to work effectively with learners and families from diverse racial, cultural, economic, and language backgrounds. The primary activity in this regard has been training to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills of staff to prepare them to better meet the needs of diverse student populations. Some examples of the types of training offered in these districts are: SEED, REACH, Ruby Payne's *Framework for Understanding Children in Poverty*, differentiation of instruction, and using data to inform instructional decision-making.

- **Curriculum and Instruction.** In addition to offering staff development, these eight school districts are also actively reviewing and modifying curriculum and instruction to align with best practices for working with diverse student populations. Districts' activities in this area include: identification of research-based and/or development of new curriculum to support students who are not making satisfactory progress, particularly in the areas of mathematics, reading, and ESL; review and enhancement of curriculum to embed multicultural content; and differentiation of instruction.
- **Evaluation and Assessment.** All of these districts are working closely with their assessment staff to monitor student data, particularly achievement data, as they use data to identify needs and inform program improvement. In addition, some districts are engaging in formal evaluations to examine the extent to which they are achieving the goals and objectives laid out in their Action Plan.
- **Student and Family Support.** Each of the eight school districts are developing and/or implementing a variety of strategies, services, and programs to support learners and families from diverse racial, cultural, economic, and language backgrounds. Examples of supports include: providing transportation and childcare to support family involvement; the use of home-school liaisons to work especially with ESL students and students transferring into the district; regular translation of key school communications into multiple languages and the use of interpreters; and a variety of extended learning opportunities for students and parents (e.g., Adult Basic Education, Early Childhood Family Education, and afterschool and summer recreational, remedial and enrichment programs for youth and adults).
- **Community Outreach.** All of the districts are involved in formal outreach of one form or another to support their work with diverse students and their families. These activities include fostering new and maintaining existing school-community partnerships that facilitate exchange of information and dialogue around issues of equity and diversity; and outreach to families around available school choice options.
- **Communication and Coordination.** In addition to community outreach, each of these districts is involved to one degree or another in developing and implementing strategies to communicate among all of the key stakeholder groups – students, parents, staff, and the broader community – to raise awareness and increase understanding of diversity and integration issues within and across the WMEP school districts. In particular, districts are focused on raising awareness of the integration issues (e.g., Minnesota's Desegregation Rule, the district's integration and diversity plan) and school choice options (e.g., Minnesota's open enrollment law, *The Choice Is Yours* program, and the two WMEP inter-district magnet schools). As members of the WMEP collaborative, each district also sends a representative to the WMEP Steering Committee to facilitate communication and decision-making among and within member districts. Districts monitor the implementation of integration activities within their own districts to ensure that district policies and procedures support both district and WMEP-wide integration goals.

Table 3.10. Teacher perceptions of the reasons for recent changes in school climate in suburban choice and Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

	Suburban Choice	Minneapolis Choice	Sample Comments
Better Climate	Percent ¹		
Administration/ leadership	28.3	11.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Our principal is very tuned into diversity and has raised the staff’s awareness of this issue.” ▪ “A principal and administrative staff who communicate openly.”
Collegiality among staff	9.1	16.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Teachers and administrators are working together to create consistent expectations.” ▪ “Department members have had more time to discuss and work out issues of curriculum.” ▪ “The staff has been with each other longer and we work well together.”
Specific programs	5.1	18.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “More diversity programs.” ▪ “All faculty are trained in Responsive Classroom management techniques.”
Improved discipline	10.1	4.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “We have agreed on school-wide discipline strategies.” ▪ “Stricter and more consistent discipline by administration.”
Worse Climate	Percent ²		
Behavior / discipline issues	16.3	11.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “There is a culture of disrespect to school policies. Students can get away with behaviors that go against our school’s policies and expectations.” ▪ “No consequences for students for inappropriate school behavior.” ▪ “Lack of a strong message on discipline by administration.”
Administration / leadership	13.2	22.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Constant change in administrative leadership.” ▪ “School administrators unwilling to do what is necessary to maintain order in fear of being politically incorrect and losing their jobs.”
Increased diversity in student body	11.1	10.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Our demographics are shifting rapidly and we’re not proactive enough yet.” ▪ “A change in the ‘face’ of our general student population. We are becoming more diverse and some teachers are not adapting.”
Budget cuts / fewer resources	6.8	13.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Cuts—especially the way they were delivered.” ▪ “Decrease in extra services and activities due to funding decline.”
More students / larger class sizes	8.9	5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Our student population has grown tremendously. Not only are our class sizes large—we are having more and more behavior problems.” ▪ “There are way too many students in the school. Many of the students are ‘high needs’ students. There are not enough staff members to be able to deal effectively with all the different needs.”

Note: ¹ Based on total number of respondents who listed a reason for their answer of ‘better.’ Respondents could list more than one reason.

² Based on total number of respondents who listed a reason for their answer of ‘worse.’ Respondents could list more than one reason.

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q5 (n=352 suburban; n = 119 Minneapolis magnet).

Table 3.11. Parent perceptions of current school's preparation to meet needs of racially and culturally diverse students.

Was school prepared to meet the needs of students of different races and cultures?	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=123)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Yes	66.2%	83.7%	77.8%	.006**	4
No	17.6	4.9	8.9		
Don't know	16.2	11.4	13.3		

*p<=.05

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q30.

When parents were asked if they felt their child's school was prepared to meet the needs of students from different economic backgrounds, their responses did not indicate any statistically significant differences between groups of parents²⁶ (see Table 3.12). Parents of Minneapolis choice and non-participating students were, however, somewhat more likely to characterized their schools as prepared to work with economically diverse student populations (79% and 71%, respectively) than parents of suburban choice students (66%). Parents' reasons for believing that their school was prepared to deal with economic diversity focused primarily on the availability of financial support for families with more limited incomes and the lack of discrimination and emphasis on equality (see Table 3.16). Parents who felt their school was not prepared to deal with economic diversity felt they were treated differently because they live in the inner city.

Table 3.12. Parent perceptions of current school's preparation to meet needs of economically diverse students.

Was school prepared to meet the needs of students who come from different economic backgrounds?	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=124)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Yes	64.7%	79.0%	71.1%	.065	4
No	16.2	6.5	9.6		
Don't know	19.1	14.5	19.3		

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q31

Finally, when parents were asked if they felt their child's school was prepared to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students, their responses indicated significant differences in perceptions of school preparedness across parent groups (see Table 3.13). Parents of Minneapolis choice and non-participating students were the most likely to characterize their schools as prepared to work with linguistically diverse populations (67% and 68%, respectively). In contrast, only 42% of parents of suburban choice students felt their child's school was prepared to work with linguistically diverse student populations. Parents' reasons

²⁶ No statistically significant differences.

for believing that their school was prepared to deal with linguistic diversity focused primarily on the fact that the school had bilingual staff and/or interpreters and special programming to support English language learners. Other parents also mentioned that the diversity of the student population has prompted the school to be more proactive in addressing the needs of linguistically diverse students (see Table 3.17). Parents who felt their school was not prepared cited the lack of bilingual staff and interpreters.

Table 3.13. Parent perceptions of current school's preparation to meet needs of linguistically diverse students.

Was school prepared to meet the needs of students who speak different languages?	Participants		Eligible, Non-participants (n=135)	Significance	
	Suburban Choice (n=136)	Minneapolis Choice (n=123)		Chi-sq.	d.f.
Yes	41.9%	66.7%	68.1%	.000***	4
No	5.1	1.6	8.1		
Don't know	52.9	31.7	23.7		

***p<=.001

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q32

Overall, parents' perceptions of their school's preparedness to meet the needs of diverse student populations indicated room for improvement in all areas, but particularly with regard to working with linguistically diverse students.

School Preparedness – Perceptions of Suburban Choice Teachers

Teachers at suburban choice schools were asked to rate their school's preparedness to meet the needs of racially, economically, and linguistically diverse students. Two out of three teachers felt that their schools were indeed prepared to meet the needs of these students. Thus teachers at suburban choice schools were just as likely as parents to believe that their schools were prepared to meet the needs of racially and economically diverse students. Teachers, however, were much more likely to characterize their schools as prepared to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse student population than the parents at these schools.

Table 3.14. Teacher perceptions of school preparedness in suburban choice schools.

	Suburban Choice Schools (n=308)			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2g. My school is prepared to meet the needs of racially diverse students.	12.1%	56.7%	28.8%	2.4%
2h. My school is prepared to meet the needs of economically diverse students.	12.5	58.4	26.7	2.4
2i. My school is prepared to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students.	13.4	50.8	31.3	4.5

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q2.

Table 3.15: Reasons parents felt school was or was not prepared to meet needs of students of different races and cultures.

	Participants		Eligible, Non- participants (n=112)	Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=111)	Minneapolis Choice (n=99)		
Prepared				
Diverse student body	29.7%	38.6%	30.6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “It’s a very diverse population—that’s the intent of the school and the diversity is celebrated.” ▪ “It’s very racially blended... they have culture nights in which everyone from a different country brings food from their countries and they all eat together, from Norway to Laos.” ▪ “Just with the different cultures—you have people from Pakistan, India, China, Soviet Union... my daughter’s friends are a rainbow of colors. They learn from each other and learn tolerance.”
Positive school climate/ students treated fairly	21.6	23.8	20.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I didn’t feel or see any type of discrimination, my kids haven’t said anything about race issues towards them, and kids seem to be treated equally.” ▪ “They always teach them that everyone is equal and treat everyone the same.”
Programs/activities value diversity	11.7	18.8	7.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They teach them different cultures and different arts and they have different events for all the nationalities.” ▪ “They have multicultural clubs that students can join.”
Bilingual staff	1.8	4.0	13.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Most of the time they have a language translator for the parents who do not understand English.” ▪ “All the newspapers and newsletters would be printed in different languages.”
Not prepared				
Negative school climate/ students treated unfairly	7.2	2.0	6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “People from different cultures were always in one group, separated.” ▪ “The kids not in the Choice program treated all of the Choice kids as if they were all poor and uneducated since they came from the inner city.”

Note: ¹ Listed in order of frequency, beginning with the most common response overall

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q30a

Table 3.16: Reasons parents felt school was or was not prepared to meet needs of students who come from different economic backgrounds.

	Participants		Eligible, Non- participants (n=102)	Sample Comments
	Suburban Choice (n=108)	Minneapolis Choice (n=99)		
Prepared				
Financial support	26.9%	40.4%	30.4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “We were having a hard time with sports fees and they helped us and waived some of the fees.” ▪ “They always have scholarship options available for kids who needed it for things like lunch and field trips.” ▪ “They have free lunch and breakfast and free transportation programs.” ▪ “They give out coats and tennis shoes and school supplies.”
Positive school climate/ students treated fairly	34.3	24.2	17.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They welcomed all kids the same, even if they don’t have the same economic class.” ▪ “Most of the kids in the Choice Is Yours program were of lower income families and we were treated the same as everyone else.” ▪ “The teachers were obviously concerned with everyone and treated everyone fairly.”
Diverse student body	11.1	15.2	15.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “This neighborhood is just like that—all kinds of different economic situations going on here.” ▪ “Various children from different economic backgrounds attend the school.”
Not prepared				
Negative school climate/ students treated unfairly	6.5	1.0	5.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Teachers and counselors made comments [to me] that were rude and judgmental.” ▪ “We live in the inner city, and they treat us differently.”

Note: ¹ Listed in order of frequency, beginning with the most common response overall

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q31a

Table 3.17: Reasons parents felt school was or was not prepared to meet needs of students who speak different languages.

	Choosers		Eligible, Non- choosers (n=100)	Sample Comments
	Suburban Transfers (n=63)	Magnet Transfers (n=80)		
Prepared				
Bilingual staff/interpreters	14.3%	31.3%	31.0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They had Somali, Hmong, and Spanish translators for family nights.” ▪ “During parent teacher conferences there were always interpreters there.” ▪ “There is a special teacher that teachers class in Spanish for recent immigrants.” ▪ “They have teachers who accommodate Hmong speaking students and also reinforce the Hmong language to them.”
Student support services	38.1	26.3	14.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They provide ESL classes to non-native speakers.” ▪ “They have a one-on-one tutorial program for people who need the extra help with language.”
Diverse student body	25.4	17.5	19.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Because there are lots of different nationalities that go to that school.” ▪ “Because there are so many different ethnic backgrounds, they don’t really have a choice.”
Teach world languages	9.5	17.5	4.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They have a great foreign language program.” ▪ “Spanish was a part of the curriculum.”
Home-school communication	3.2	6.3	6.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “The school has people that can communicate with the parents.” ▪ “Because a lot of the notices [from school] come in three or four languages.”
Not prepared				
Lack of bilingual staff	6.3	0.0	6.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “They didn’t have any interpreters.” ▪ “Parents need help in conferences and students have to interpret for them.” ▪ “They do not have teachers who speak Native American languages or other immigrant languages [such as] Somalian or Ethiopian.”

Note: ¹ Listed in order of frequency, beginning with the most common response overall

Source: 2003 Parent Interview, Q32a

Teachers in suburban choice schools were also asked to comment on the extent to which the characteristics of their school's student population influenced their classroom practice. As shown in Table 3.18, teachers in these schools felt their practice was most affected by the range of academic abilities in their classrooms, and yet identified this challenge as the one they currently felt quite prepared to address (see Table 3.19). Students with special needs also affected teachers' classroom practice, as did large class sizes which may have contributed to the challenges of dealing with disruptive students. Teachers felt the least prepared to deal with these three issues. Relatively few teachers felt that the diversity of students' backgrounds greatly affected their practice.

Table 3.18. Teacher perceptions of factors influencing classroom practice in suburban choice schools.

	Suburban Choice Schools (n=308)			
	A great deal	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
a. Students with differing academic abilities	57.7%	31.9%	9.6%	0.8%
b. Students who come from a wide range of backgrounds	23.9	48.8	21.5	5.8
c. Students with special needs	41.6	38.5	18.8	1.1
d. Uninterested students	33.2	43.1	19.9	3.7
e. Disruptive students	42.2	29.6	25.0	3.2
f. High student/teacher ratio	43.4	27.8	21.0	7.8

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q3.

Table 3.19. Extent to which teachers feel prepared to deal with factors influencing classroom practice in suburban choice schools.

	Suburban Choice Schools (n=308)			
	A great deal	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
a. Students with differing academic abilities	44.9%	49.2%	5.9%	0.0%
b. Students who come from a wide range of backgrounds	22.2	64.6	12.4	0.8
c. Students with special needs	29.4	54.8	15.1	0.8
d. Uninterested students	20.8	56.7	20.3	2.1
e. Disruptive students	25.6	58.6	14.2	1.6
f. High student/teacher ratio	13.7	63.4	19.1	3.8

Source: Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q4.

School Preparedness – Perceptions of Minneapolis Choice Teachers

Teachers at Minneapolis choice schools were asked to rate their school's preparedness to meet the needs of racially, economically, and linguistically diverse students (see Table 3.20). Three out of five teachers felt that their schools were indeed prepared to meet the needs of these students. In comparison, teachers at the Minneapolis choice schools were just as likely as parents to believe that their schools were prepared to meet the needs of racially and economically diverse students. Teachers, however, were much more likely than parents to characterize their schools as prepared to meet the needs of a linguistically diverse student population.

Table 3.20. Teacher perceptions of school preparedness in Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

	Minneapolis Choice Schools (n=123)			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
g. My school is prepared to meet the needs of racially diverse students.	30.1	56.1	13.0	0.8
h. My school is prepared to meet the needs of economically diverse students.	29.3	56.1	14.6	0.0
i. My school is prepared to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students.	26.1	54.6	16.8	2.5

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q2.

Teachers in Minneapolis choice schools were also asked to comment on the extent to which the characteristics of their school's student population influenced their classroom practice. As shown in Table 3.21, teachers in these schools felt their practice was most affected by the range of academic abilities in their classrooms, the varied backgrounds of their students, and disruptive students; all challenges they felt quite prepared to address (see Table 3.22). Roughly one-third of teachers in these schools felt that the large class sizes and the presence of special needs students greatly influenced their classroom practice. Relatively few teachers felt prepared to address these two particular challenges.

Table 3.21. Teacher perceptions of factors influencing classroom practice in Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

	Minneapolis Choice Schools (n=123)			
	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A great deal
a. Students with differing academic abilities	3.3	8.1	24.4	64.2
b. Students who come from a wide range of backgrounds	6.6	9.0	42.6	41.8
c. Students with special needs	1.7	16.7	50.8	30.8
d. Uninterested students	4.9	32.0	42.6	20.5
e. Disruptive students	3.3	23.8	34.4	38.5
f. High student/teacher ratio	11.6	22.3	33.9	32.2

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q3.

Table 3.22. Extent to which teachers feel prepared to deal with factors influencing classroom practice in Minneapolis choice schools.

	Minneapolis Choice Schools (n=123)			
	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	A great deal
a. Students with differing academic abilities	0.0	2.5	40.5	57.0
b. Students who come from a wide range of backgrounds	0.0	3.3	43.1	53.7
c. Students with special needs	0.0	9.8	62.6	27.6
d. Uninterested students	0.8	14.6	57.7	26.8
e. Disruptive students	2.5	6.6	49.6	41.3
f. High student/teacher ratio	1.7	20.7	56.9	20.7

Source: Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools, Q4.

Section 4:

Impact on Students

This section examines data on the effects of participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program on students' academic achievement and school attendance. It also raises issues related to the examination of discipline data as a means of assessing program effectiveness.

Evaluation Topics and Guiding Questions: Academic Achievement, Attendance, and Discipline

15. What effect does participation in the program have on academic achievement, attendance, and discipline (as defined by the State data collection system) when compared with comparison groups of Minneapolis Public School (MPS) students?

Data sources: 3rd and 5th Grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments; 8th Grade Basic Skills Test;

Sampling

The following analyses of student outcomes compare students who chose to enroll in the inter-district (suburban choice) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program to students who were eligible to enroll in the suburban schools but chose to remain in Minneapolis (eligible, non-suburban participants). It is important to emphasize that this latter group (eligible, non-suburban participants) includes students who enrolled in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools and eligible students who chose to enroll in another Minneapolis public school. The available enrollment data did not allow for an accurate disaggregation of the eligible, non-suburban participants into Minneapolis choice magnet participants and other eligible students enrolled in other Minneapolis public schools.²⁷

Academic Achievement

Data and Limitations. To examine whether participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program had an impact on students' academic achievement, the initial evaluation plan called for an analysis of data from the Minnesota state assessments in grades 3, 5, and 8 and a cross-district analysis of standardized achievement data, with both analyses controlling for prior student achievement.

After only two years of implementation, however, the number of students enrolled in *The Choice Is Yours* program at the grade levels tested by the state assessments (grades 3, 5, and 8) was too small to conduct a cohort analysis on this data. Such an analysis is necessary to provide data on students' prior achievement by linking, for example, students' 3rd grade scores to their 5th grade scores. As enrollment in the program increases over time, a cohort analysis of the Minnesota state assessments will likely be feasible.

²⁷ See Appendix A: Evaluation Design and Technical Considerations and Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers for further discussion of issues related to data availability.

Plans to conduct a cross-district analysis of changes in student performance for participants and non-participants using standardized achievement data from participating school districts had to be set aside until the relationships among some of the key stakeholders in *The Choice Is Yours* program could support the level of cross-district collaboration required to plan and conduct this analysis.²⁸ Such an analysis is planned for next year, when five school districts will compare the achievement of participants to non-participants in an analysis of data from the Northwest Achievement Level Tests.²⁹ These analyses will examine student achievement data from the first three years of *The Choice Is Yours* program for suburban choice participants, Minneapolis choice participants, and eligible, non-participants and will include an analysis of key factors known to influence student achievement (e.g., prior achievement, attendance, mobility, socioeconomic status and other student demographics).

For the time being, the data from the Minnesota state assessments in grades 3, 5, and 8 were analyzed for suburban choice and eligible, non-suburban choice participants without controlling for prior achievement. In addition to participant/non-participant status, no other factors were examined in these analyses. All students, by virtue of their being *eligible* to participate in the program were eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches.

Without data on students' prior achievement levels (that is, whether students who chose to attend suburban choice schools were performing at, above, or below other eligible students) the findings from the current data, while interesting are not sufficient to determine the extent to which these differences are due to participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program. The findings are presented here to acquaint the reader with the types of analyses that may be conducted in the future, should the number of students enrolled in the tested grade levels increase to appropriate levels with the continued growth of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Summary of Analyses. Table 4.1 presents the average scale scores for suburban choice students and eligible, non-suburban participants for the first and second years of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Each of the differences noted below are considered "educationally significant"³⁰; that is, of such a magnitude as to indicate a meaningful difference in educational practices or outcomes. These findings do not take students' prior achievement or other factors into consideration.

²⁸ Given the nature of the Northwest Achievement Level Tests, a number of technical issues must be collaboratively addressed by the assessment directors in each of districts to ensure that the cross-district comparisons are conducted appropriately. Many of the key issues have already been identified by the assessment directors; despite these issues, the group agrees that a cross-district comparison is indeed feasible.

²⁹ Edina, Hopkins, Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, and Wayzata all administer the Northwest Achievement Level Tests which are aligned with state standards and administered annually across a continuous span of grade levels (e.g., grades 4-8), thus allowing for analysis of change.

³⁰ See Greenwood, C.R., Carta, J.J., & Kamps, D. (1990). Teacher-mediated versus peer-mediated instruction: A review of educational advantages and disadvantages. In H.C. Foot, M.J. Morgan, and R. H. Shute (Eds.), *Children helping children* (pp.177-206). Chichester, West Sussex, England: John Wiley and Sons Ltd. See also Cohen, J. (1988) *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Year 1 - Participant/Non-participant Comparisons

- 5th grade math - suburban choice students scored lower on average than eligible, non-suburban participants (effect size = 0.29)
- 8th grade reading - suburban choice students scored higher on average than eligible, non-suburban participants (effect size = 0.33)

Year 2 - Participant/Non-participant Comparisons

- 3rd grade reading - suburban choice students scored higher on average than eligible, non-suburban participants (effect size = 0.38)
- 3rd grade math - suburban choice students scored higher on average than eligible, non-suburban participants (effect size = 0.36)
- 5th grade reading - suburban choice students scored higher on average than eligible, non-suburban participants (effect size = 0.37)

Table 4.2 presents similar data on average scale scores for suburban choice and eligible, non-suburban participants but separates out the achievement of new and returning suburban choice students in year two to examine the potential long term effects of participation. Each of the differences noted below are considered “educationally significant”³¹ but do not take into consideration students’ prior achievement or other factors.

Year 2 – New and Returning Participant/Non-participant Comparisons

- 3rd grade reading $d = .25$ (returning suburban choice students -- enrolled in the CIY program both years -- scored higher on average than eligible, non-suburban participants)
- 3rd grade math $d = .37$ (returning suburban choice participants -- enrolled in the CIY program both years -- scored higher on average than eligible, non-suburban participants)

³¹ See Greenwood, C.R., Carta, J.J., & Kamps, D. (1990). Teacher-mediated versus peer-mediated instruction: A review of educational advantages and disadvantages. In H.C. Foot, M.J. Morgan, and R. H. Shute (Eds.), *Children helping children* (pp.177-206). Chichester, West Sussex, England: John Wiley and Sons Ltd. See also Cohen, J. (1988) *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Table 4.1. Comparison of average achievement scores for *The Choice Is Yours* suburban choice students and all other eligible non-suburban participants by subject and grade level, 2001-02 and 2002-03.

		Year 1: 2001-2002		Year 2: 2002-2003 ³	
		Suburban Choice Participants	Eligible Non- Suburban Participants	Suburban Choice Participants	Eligible Non- Suburban Participants
3 rd Grade Reading	Ave. Scale Score	1230	1233	1398	1321 ¹
	(s.d.)	(360.43)	(305.66)	(187.31)	(213.55)
	No. tested	35	2429	41	1768
3 rd Grade Math	Ave. Scale Score	1169	1228	1433	1346 ¹
	(s.d.)	(538.00)	(385.78)	(236.31)	(240.23)
	No. tested	35	2429	44	1779
5 th Grade Reading	Ave. Scale Score	1210	1254	1428	1355 ¹
	(s.d.)	(483.46)	(339.87)	(179.23)	(219.54)
	No. tested	28	2624	36	2089
5 th Grade Math	Ave. Scale Score	1114	1242 ¹	1398	1354
	(s.d.)	(532.55)	(362.80)	(178.10)	(203.57)
	No. tested	28	2624	37	2102
8 th Grade Reading	Ave. Scale Score	608	590 ¹	597	594
	(s.d.)	(56.11)	(46.94)	(42.64)	(51.49)
	No. tested	28	2043	49	1980
8 th Grade Math	Ave. Scale Score	583	580	585	585
	(s.d.)	(47.80)	(50.63)	(45.28)	(50.66)
	No. tested	28	2054	53	1966

Notes:

Suburban Choice Participants = Participants in *The Choice Is Yours* interdistrict transfer program

Eligible, Non-Participants = Includes all Minneapolis students who were eligible to participate in the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, but chose to remain in the district. As such, it includes students who enrolled in Minneapolis choice magnet schools and eligible students who chose neither option.

¹ Statistically significant difference: small effect size ($d \geq .25$)

² Statistically significant difference: moderate effect size ($d \geq .50$)

³ To ensure comparability across years, the average scale scores for 2002-2003 are the more rigorous DRC scale scores used in previous years, rather than the scale scores calculated under the new *No Child Left Behind* data rules, which are more lenient and result in a greater number of students achieving proficiency.

Sources: 3rd and 5th grade *Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments* and 8th grade *Basic Skills Tests*, 2002 and 2003.

Table 4.2. Comparison of average achievement scores for new and returning *The Choice Is Yours* suburban choice students and all other eligible non-suburban participants by subject and grade level, 2002-03.

		Year 2: 2002-2003 ³		
		Suburban Choice Participants		Eligible Non-Suburban Participants
		New	Returning	
3 rd Grade Reading	Ave. Scale Score	1396	1399 ¹	1321 ¹
	(s.d.)	(187.76)	(191.91)	(213.55)
	No. tested	22	19	1768
3 rd Grade Math	Ave. Scale Score	1393	1477 ¹	1346 ¹
	(s.d.)	(249.49)	(218.47)	(240.23)
	No. tested	23	21	1779
5 th Grade Reading	Ave. Scale Score	1423	1433	1355
	(s.d.)	(135.55)	(218.41)	(219.54)
	No. tested	18	18	2089
5 th Grade Math	Ave. Scale Score	1399	1396	1354
	(s.d.)	(172.57)	(188.77)	(203.57)
	No. tested	19	18	2102
8 th Grade Reading	Ave. Scale Score	596	598	594
	(s.d.)	(39.99)	(46.35)	(51.49)
	No. tested	26	23	1980
8 th Grade Math	Ave. Scale Score	587	583	585
	(s.d.)	(46.79)	(44.40)	(50.66)
	No. tested	28	25	1966

Notes:

Suburban Choice = Participants in *The Choice Is Yours* interdistrict transfer program

Eligible, Non-Participants = Includes all Minneapolis students who were eligible to participate in the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, but chose to remain in the district. As such, it includes students who enrolled in Minneapolis choice magnet schools and eligible students who chose neither option.

¹ Statistically significant difference: small effect size ($d \geq .25$)

² Statistically significant difference: moderate effect size ($d \geq .50$)

³ To ensure comparability across years, the average scale scores for 2002-2003 are the more rigorous DRC scale scores used in previous years, rather than the scale scores calculated under the new *No Child Left Behind* data rules, which are more lenient and result in a greater number of students achieving proficiency.

Sources: 3rd and 5th grade *Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments* and 8th grade *Basic Skills Tests*, 2002 and 2003.

Attendance

At the time of this evaluation, official end-of-year attendance data was available for the first year of *The Choice Is Yours* program (2001-02)³². The average attendance rates of *The Choice Is Yours* suburban choice participants and eligible, non-suburban participants were compared across key subgroups that include gender, ethnicity, limited English proficiency, and special education. By virtue of their eligibility to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program, all of these students were eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches. The analyses of student attendance take into consideration the length of time a student had been enrolled in a particular school when calculating attendance rates.³³

Table 4.3 shows the weighted average attendance rates by grade level for suburban choice students and eligible, non-suburban participants. Attendance rates for participants and non-participants at the elementary and middle grades were about the same as the statewide average for students with the same socioeconomic status. At the high school level, however, the attendance rates for participants and non-participants were lower than the rate for their economic counterparts statewide.³⁴

Consistent with state trends showing a pattern of declining attendance rates through the middle and high school grades across student subgroups, the attendance patterns for these suburban choice and eligible, non-suburban participants also declined across grade levels for every subgroup listed in Table 4.3.

At every grade level, attendance rates were virtually identical for suburban choice participants and eligible, non-suburban participants across all subgroups. Only one statistically significant difference was noted. This difference is considered “educationally significant”; that is, of such a magnitude as to indicate a meaningful difference in educational practices or outcomes.

- In the middle grades, the average attendance rate of white suburban choice participants (90%) was significantly lower than that of white non-suburban participants (93%). The magnitude of this difference is small (effect size = 0.25).

Similarly, Table 4.4 shows the weighted average attendance rates by grade level for suburban choice students while they were attending a suburban choice school. In comparing the

³² Official attendance data for the previous school year is available the following fall, in late October.

³³ Average attendance rate was calculated for each student based on all of the student's regular school year enrollments (i.e., excludes summer enrollment). Each enrollment record was weighted by the length of time a student remained at that enrollment status (i.e., the corresponding average daily membership), to better represent the proportion of time a student spent in different types of enrollments (e.g., traditional vs. alternative school programs; different schools or districts). Finally, a weighted average attendance rate was computed for each student. Table 5.3 presents the mean of this weighted average attendance rate for participants and non-participants.

³⁴ See Davison, M.L., Davenport, E.D., Kwak, N., Seo, Y.S., Peterson, K.A., Irish, M.L., Chan, C.K., Choi, J., Harring, J., Kang, Y.J., & Wu, Y.C. (2003). *2002 Minnesota education yearbook: The status of pre-K-12 education in Minnesota*. Minneapolis, MN: Office of Educational Accountability, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.

attendance rates for suburban choice students across all of their enrollments during the regular school year (Table 4.3) to their attendance rate while enrolled in suburban choice schools (Table 4.4), the only differences occur in the high school grades. High school students' average attendance rate while enrolled in suburban choice schools is lower than their overall attendance rate, particularly for girls and students with limited English proficiency. This finding suggests higher levels of absenteeism for girls and ELL students in the upper grade levels while they were enrolled in the suburban choice schools.

Table 4.3. Comparison of weighted average attendance rates for *The Choice Is Yours* suburban choice students and eligible, non-suburban participants by grade level and key subgroups, 2001-02.

		Weighted Average Attendance Rates by Grade Levels							
		Elementary (Gr.1-5)		Middle (Gr. 6-8)		High School (Gr. 9-12)		All (Gr. 1-12)	
		Sub. Choice Partic.	Elig. Non-sub partic.	Sub. Choice Partic.	Elig. Non-sub partic.	Sub. Choice Partic.	Elig. Non-sub partic.	Sub. Choice Partic.	Elig. Non-sub partic.
All Students		94	95	91	92	85	85	90	91
(s.d.)		(5.7)	(6.2)	(9.0)	(8.6)	(13.2)	(15.8)	(10.6)	(11.2)
N		151	12667	139	7266	167	8217	457	28150
Gender	% Female	95	95	90	92	86	85	90	91
	(s.d.)	(4.7)	(6.0)	(10.1)	(8.6)	(12.4)	(16.0)	(10.1)	(11.4)
	N	80	6152	82	3433	76	4044	238	13629
	% Male	93	94	92	92	84	86	89	91
	(s.d.)	(6.6)	(6.4)	(6.9)	(8.6)	(13.9)	(15.6)	(11.2)	(11.0)
	N	71	6515	57	3833	91	4173	219	14521
Ethnicity	% Black	94	94	91	91	85	84	89	90
	(s.d.)	(6.7)	(6.9)	(6.7)	(9.1)	(13.4)	(16.5)	(10.6)	(11.9)
	N	76	6271	81	3884	102	4570	259	14725
	% White	94	95	90	93 ¹	85	86	90	91
	(s.d.)	(4.8)	(5.9)	(12.7)	(7.5)	(13.6)	(15.4)	(11.3)	(10.7)
	N	47	1434	30	800	38	943	115	3177
LEP % Eligible		96	96	95	95	85	88	93	94
(s.d.)		(2.8)	(4.5)	(4.1)	(6.2)	(16.1)	(13.7)	(10.0)	(9.3)
N		24	4431	15	2127	15	2855	54	9413
Spec. Ed. % Rec. Svcs.		92	93	87	89	85	82	88	88
(s.d.)		(8.6)	(6.2)	(8.0)	(10.9)	(11.5)	(17.6)	(9.8)	(12.9)
N		27	1814	27	1320	23	1352	77	4486

Notes: Weighted average attendance rates were calculated from all enrollments occurring during the regular school year (i.e, excludes summer enrollment), weighted by the average daily membership (ADM) for each record of enrollment.

Suburban Choice Participants = Participants in *The Choice Is Yours* interdistrict transfer program

Eligible, Non-Participants = Includes all Minneapolis students who were eligible to participate in the suburban choice portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program, but chose to remain in the district. As such, it includes students who enrolled in Minneapolis choice magnet schools and eligible students who chose neither option.

¹ Statistically significant difference: small effect size ($d \geq .25$)

² Statistically significant difference: moderate effect size ($d \geq .50$)

Source: Official end-of-year MARSS data for 2001-02.

Table 4.4. Weighted average attendance rates for suburban choice students while attending *The Choice Is Yours* schools by grade level and key subgroups, 2001-02.

		Weighted Average Attendance Rates While Enrolled in Suburban Choice Schools by Grade Levels			
		Elementary (Gr.1-5)	Middle (Gr. 6-8)	High School (Gr. 9-12)	All (Gr. 1-12)
All Students		94	91	84	89
	(s.d.)	(6.1)	(10.0)	(16.0)	(12.0)
	N	149	139	161	449
Gender	% Female	95	90	83	90
	(s.d.)	(4.7)	(11.7)	(17.5)	(11.4)
	N	79	82	72	233
	% Male	93	92	83	89
	(s.d.)	(7.3)	(7.0)	(17.5)	(13.5)
	N	70	57	89	216
Ethnicity	% Black	94	91	84	89
	(s.d.)	(7.4)	(7.9)	(15.0)	(11.9)
	N	75	81	98	254
	% White	94	90	83	89
	(s.d.)	(4.8)	(13.0)	(18.3)	(13.6)
	N	47	30	37	114
LEP	% Eligible	96	95	82	92
	(s.d.)	(2.8)	(4.1)	(22.3)	(12.8)
	N	23	15	13	51
Spec. Ed.	% Rec. Svcs.	92	87	85	88
	(s.d.)	(9.7)	(10.2)	(13.3)	(11.3)
	N	27	27	22	76
<p>Notes: Weighted average attendance rates were calculated from all enrollments occurring during the regular school year (i.e., excludes summer enrollment), weighted by the average daily membership (ADM) for each record of enrollment.</p> <p>Suburban Choice Participants = Participants in <i>The Choice Is Yours</i> interdistrict transfer program</p> <p>Eligible, Non-Participants = Includes all Minneapolis students who were eligible to participate in the suburban choice portion of <i>The Choice Is Yours</i> program, but chose to remain in the district. As such, it includes students who enrolled in Minneapolis choice magnet schools and eligible students who chose neither option.</p> <p>¹ Statistically significant difference: small effect size ($d \geq .25$)</p> <p>² Statistically significant difference: moderate effect size ($d \geq .50$)</p> <p>Source: Official end-of-year MARSS data for 2001-02.</p>					

Discipline

The original evaluation plan, as requested by the state, included an analysis of student discipline data as a means of examining whether *The Choice Is Yours* students were more or less likely to be subject to disciplinary actions in suburban choice schools than in their previous school. Further examination of the available data revealed several threats to validity and reliability, most notably due to the wide variation in the ways in which disciplinary actions are instituted across different schools and districts, and general discrepancies in the discipline policies across districts. As an example, some districts have a “zero tolerance” policy whereby a student displaying a particular behavior is automatically suspended from school while in another district the standard policy suggests an alternative action for the same behavior. In addition to differing policies across districts, the implementation of policies and accuracy of reporting within districts varies considerably. As a result, both state and district records of common disciplinary actions suffer from poor reliability and validity. For these reasons, no analysis of official student discipline data was conducted for the evaluation. A team of assessment directors may work with the evaluator in subsequent evaluations to assess whether a new form of record-keeping may provide more usable discipline data.

In lieu of school reports of student behavior, data collected from parents of students attending the suburban choice and Minneapolis choice schools – both parents of students participating and not participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program – and the teachers at those schools may be reviewed to shed some light on the issue of school’s approach to behavior management. As noted under Section 3: School Responsiveness, parents in each group felt that at their schools, the rules and expectations for student behavior were clear, enforced, and administered fairly. Teachers at suburban choice schools, however, did not agree that such rules were enforced while teachers at Minneapolis choice schools did not perceive the rules as being administered fairly.

Section 5:

Student Experiences

Prepared by Amy Bemis, Evaluation Consultant

In this final section, the experiences of students enrolled in suburban choice schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program are revealed through focus groups conducted with secondary students attending these schools during the 2002-2003 school year. The guiding question that the focus groups were designed to answer was, “How do students in the inter-district transfer program interpret their school experiences?” The findings are presented in terms of the themes emerging across secondary schools that enrolled *The Choice Is Yours* students and may be appropriately used to reflect on the ways in which students articulate their experiences.

Evaluation Topics and Guiding Questions: Student Experiences

16. How do students in the inter-district transfer program interpret their school experiences?

Data source: 25 focus groups with 109 inter-district transfer students from 20 middle, junior high, and high schools

A total of 109 students from 20 middle, junior high, and high schools in eight districts participated in 25 focus groups held between April 24 and May 13, 2003. Each group consisted of two to eight students and lasted approximately 45 minutes. As noted in Table A6 in Appendix A, over three-quarters (78%) of the focus group participants were students of color and just over half (56%) were female. Students in grades six through eight accounted for half of the participants, with the smallest representation coming from grade 12. The majority (70%) of students had been attending the district for one or two years, with the average length of time being 2.3 years. At the beginning of the focus group, students were asked to respond anonymously to two written questions. Those results indicated that 3 out of 5 students had heard of *The Choice is Yours* program and just under half (44%) knew that they were participating in the program.

To reflect the fact that students’ experiences in *The Choice Is Yours* program are shaped in part by the schools in which they enroll, the results of the focus groups are presented in terms of the *number of schools at which one or more students raised a particular issue*³⁵ rather than on the total number of focus groups or total number of students. Unless otherwise noted the total number of schools being reported on is 20.³⁶ It is important to keep in mind that an issue being raised at half of the schools (10 of the 20 schools) is not the same as an issue being raised by half of the students. When an issue was raised at 25% or fewer of the schools (5 of 20), the actual number of schools is generally not reported to encourage that the

³⁵ Within the context of focus groups, it is risky to assume that the frequency or extensiveness of individual comments is equivalent to importance or, for that matter, representative of all students. For this reason, the focus group methodology is appropriately used to identify common themes across focus groups.

³⁶ Due to time constraints, students at one school were not asked about perceptions of differential treatment.

emphasis remain on the more commonly expressed themes. Instead, these comments are framed as arising at “some” or a “few” of the schools or group under “other”. Figure 5.1 below summarizes the kudos and concerns of students participating in these focus groups. It is provided as a tool for these schools to reflect upon their preparedness to promote the positive features of the program and to address issues that may already or potentially exist in their school.

Figure 5.1. Kudos and Concerns from Students Attending <i>The Choice Is Yours</i> Suburban Choice Secondary Schools		
<p>This summary highlights kudos and concerns that emerged from focus groups held with secondary students participating in <i>The Choice Is Yours</i> suburban choice program during the second year of the program. For the most part, a theme was included if it was raised by students at least half of the schools. In some instances, the nature of the theme warranted attention and thus inclusion.</p>		
	Kudos	Concerns
Academics and Extracurricular Activities		<input type="checkbox"/> Adjusting to more challenging academic programs at suburban schools
School Climate		<input type="checkbox"/> Transition to new school can be challenging when do not know any other students upon transferring <input type="checkbox"/> Negative stereotypes among suburban students of Minneapolis and the people that live there <input type="checkbox"/> Adjusting to less racial diversity and different cultural beliefs, attitudes, and norms among students <input type="checkbox"/> Perceptions of differential treatment by staff
Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular busing to and from school worked well for transfer students	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of transportation when staying after school (or no knowledge of available options) <input type="checkbox"/> Not altering bus schedule for early release or late start days, and late buses <input type="checkbox"/> Bus drivers are “mean” or “careless”; substitute drivers unfamiliar with routes

Reasons for Attending

Focus group participants were asked about the decision to enroll in their current district, as well as how they selected their particular school. Some students reported that it had not been their choice, but rather that of their parent(s), and that they did not know how the decision had been made. Most, however, were aware of why they were attending, whether it had been their decision or that of their parent(s).

Choosing a District

At 17 of the 20 schools, students reported that they were enrolled at their district in order to get a better education. Examples of their comments included:

- *Most people [in Minneapolis] go to school to have fun instead of learning and in this school it's more learning than having fun.*
- *Teachers [in the suburban school] would give examples and answer questions. In Minneapolis, they just give you a worksheet.*
- *They got good teachers that want to help you.*
- *[Teachers] make the extra effort to help you understand.*

Students at 16 schools spoke of being unhappy with the Minneapolis Public Schools. Their specific complaints included the following:

- *When you're in Minneapolis, most kids who do want to learn are interrupted by other students that don't want to learn.*
- *Apparently [my Minneapolis high school] is on the academic failure list.*
- *It was so bad [in Minneapolis] that when I signed up for private school, they made me go back a grade to get in, so I just wasted so many years at that [Minneapolis] school.*
- *The teachers aren't very good and the principals are mean to people and they're not very fair and there was a lot of fights at that [Minneapolis] school.*
- *Too many threats and weapons [in Minneapolis schools].*
- *I didn't want to go to [Minneapolis high school] because if you're within a two-mile radius, you've got to walk to school every day and I wasn't going to walk to school, and I wanted less fights, so I decided to come here.*

Other reasons students cited for choosing the particular suburban school district included: previously living and/or attending school in the suburban district; getting into trouble in the Minneapolis Public Schools; parent not wanting their child to get into trouble; and parent having worked in the suburban district.

Choosing a School

The fact that a friend or relative was already attending the school influenced students' decision to enroll at 14 of the schools. As one student explained, "I knew kids from my

church program that went here and I didn't like [Minneapolis high school], so why not try coming here?"

At 9 of the 20 schools, students pointed to the fact that the school was close and/or convenient. "It was on the way to my mom's job," explained one student.

The presence of a particular academic program or classes available was cited by students at 6 of the schools as influencing their choice of schools. Their specific remarks included:

- *We thought [this suburban high school] would have the best classes and different choices for me to choose from.*
- *We've heard really good things about [this suburban high school] and their theater and their extracurricular activities.*
- *They have Advanced Placement (AP) psychology.*
- *I came here mainly because of the American Sign Language (ASL) program.*
- *They have a good choir program.*
- *They have a better Spanish program here.*

Other reasons for selecting a particular school offered by the focus group participants included: better discipline at the suburban school; better sports program; the school accepted their application; and a teacher or coach encouraged them to attend.

Transition to School

Focus group participants were asked to think back to their transition into their school, and whether it had been difficult, easy, or somewhere in-between. Eighty-one percent of students participating in the focus groups (88 of 109 students) provided individual responses to this question. Of these students, 50% characterized the transition as being easy for them, while 28% remarked that it had been difficult. The remaining 22% characterized their transition as somewhere in-between, being both easy and difficult at times.

Easy Transition

At 12 of the schools, students describing the transition as easy said it was because they already knew at least one other person attending the school. As one middle school student volunteered, "It was easy for me because I knew some of my friends that were coming here and because most of the sixth graders were coming from different schools anyway, so we were all trying to meet each other."

Students at 10 of the schools attributed their smooth transition to the fact that they had made friends easily. "For me, it was pretty easy because when I first came here two years ago, people were really open. I made friends the second day," shared one participant.

Another reason students believed their transition was easy was the friendly nature of the people their new school. One student reflected, "The people are all really nice and it's just a

nice environment to be in.” Still students at some schools commented that the transition was eased because their new school was easier academically than their previous one had been.

Difficult Transition

At nearly half of the schools (9 of 20), students recalled that it had been difficult to adjust to a different school culture and student population. The following remarks reflect this sentiment:

- *I’m used to being around an all-black environment and I walk in here... I’m like the only black kid in one of my classes.*
- *My sophomore year when I came, that was probably the worst year of my life in high school—adjusting to the different environment that [the suburban school] had... When you been going to a school mostly dominated by African-Americans and then you come out here and it’s mostly dominated by whites, it can be kind of an adjustment, getting used to it.*
- *Hard to fit in with [suburban] kids... because they know we’re from Minneapolis... and they’ve been friends for a long time and they act different [than us].*
- *It’s harder to adjust to the people here ‘cause they’re different than the kids in Minneapolis. I don’t want to say all of them are really stuck up, but a lot of the people I know are very stuck up and they rely on mommy and daddy for everything and they’re not exposed to a lot of the things that we’re exposed to.*

In addition, at nearly half of the schools (9 of 20), students explained that the transition had been difficult because they did not know anyone or have friends at their new school. “I didn’t want to come to this school. When you go to a school and you have all your friends, and then you go to another school and you don’t know nobody but your sister, it’s hard. I don’t make friends that easy,” admitted one participant.

Other factors that made these students’ transitions difficult included: finding the academics to be more challenging (6 schools); being new to the country; and having issues with transportation.

Students were asked a follow-up question regarding whether there was anything the school could have done to make the transition easier for them. Most participants did not generate any recommendations, with several adding statements such as the following:

- *There’s nothing you can do [about the lack of diversity] because it depends on the people that enroll in this school and obviously most black people didn’t want to be in this school.*
- *Well, you can’t change the way people are, and that was probably the biggest aspect was getting along with the people...you can’t make that easier because that’s how people are.*

Feelings of Being Welcome

Focus group participants were also asked to reflect on whether or not they had felt welcome at the school—by students, teachers, and principals—at the beginning of the school year. The vast majority of respondents replied that they had felt welcome by people at the school.

Asked to elaborate, their comments included the following:

- *If you get introduced by one friend that's in a big group, you know everybody. They're not going to judge you right away—they're going to get to know you. They're so welcoming.*
- *When they found out that I was from another country, everybody was interested and asking questions—the teachers and everybody.*
- *Most of the teachers make you feel welcome.*
- *The administrators here are really cool and they made sure that we felt welcome.*
- *[The principal] knew my name by the first or second week of school. It's really cool to see that he cares so much.*

The small number of students who responded that they had not felt welcome also were asked to clarify their answers. Examples of their responses included:

- *No. You come to this school, it's like they look at me like I'm ghetto... To me, that doesn't feel welcoming.*
- *A lot of the teachers—not really. It kind of seemed like they weren't wanting to teach... to me, it looked like they didn't want to help me.*
- *Sometimes I asked teachers for help or something, and they would ignore me.*
- *The principals act like they're a lot tougher and stronger and bigger than everybody else in the whole school.*

Perception of Treatment at School

Students were asked whether they believed they had been treated differently by anyone at the school because they lived in Minneapolis. At 18 of 19 schools, students claimed that they had not been treated differently by students, teachers, or administrators.

At 7 of the 19 schools, however, students claimed that they had been treated differently by teachers and characterized these experiences as less than desirable. Students at some of the schools described instances where they felt teachers treated them differently based on where they live or, in some cases, their race. Following are some examples of their comments:

- *Because of my race, [one teacher will] always say something to us when we're not doing nothing, but if two people in front of us that are a different race than us are sitting at their desks talking, he be like, 'At least they're talking where I can't hear them.'*
- *[Teachers] kind of get angry at us for taking advantage of their good program. It seems like they have a little resentment.*

- *I've had a teacher give us an assignment that I couldn't do in my neighborhood... She knew that and she was like, 'Well, that's not my problem. You shouldn't go to this school then.'*
- *In some of my classes, I'm the only black person in there. You can put your hand up, but [teachers] don't call on you.*
- *[A teacher] will always point out... that me and this girl were the only two African Americans in the class and I hate when that happens.*

At a few of the schools, students discussed differential treatment in light of discipline not being equitable for urban and suburban students. Their claims included:

- *Let's say a Choice student and a non-Choice student get into a fight or whatever—they always take the non-Choice student's story.*
- *Mostly it be the black people getting suspended. When the white people be getting in fights, they just say, 'Don't do it again.'*
- *My sister got expelled for the whole semester, and some kids will do something that live over here and they get expelled, but not for the whole entire semester.*
- *[A Choice student] got caught once with marijuana and was expelled. This kid that I know [who lives in the district] was doing meth and selling prescription pills and he just got suspended. I feel that if we do something, it's ten times worse than the punishments that the kids here get.*

Still, students at some of the schools shared experiences where they felt teachers' differential treatment of them was favorable. These students believed that it was because they live in Minneapolis that their teachers provide them with additional assistance. Examples of their remarks follow:

- *The teachers go out of their way to help us.*
- *Some of the teachers, when they figure out that you live in Minneapolis, sometimes they give you extra help or extra homework because they think that you might not make it in the class.*
- *Sometimes the teachers... will make plans for you to stay after school 'cause they know the work is harder out here than it is in Minneapolis, so they let you sign an agreement so you can stay after with them. So sometimes [being treated differently] can be a positive. Teachers help you out and give you more slack on your work.*

Students also raised related issues when asked to comment on differential treatment at their schools. At 14 of 19 schools, students commented that suburban students have stereotypes about Minneapolis. Examples of their remarks included:

- *Their stereotypes of Minneapolis and the people that live in Minneapolis are really negative. They think that we live in the projects and we're all poor and every black person that lives there is in a gang, and none of that's true.*
- *[Students] think that I'm different in some way... probably lower than them or something, the way they act around me because I'm from Minneapolis.*

- *They think you're poor automatically, when Minneapolis has some of the richest neighborhoods in the state.*
- *The first question [students] always ask me is if I'm a gangster or something or if I killed somebody, but just 'cause you live in a ghetto doesn't mean you kill people.*
- *This one girl asked me if my dad was in jail.*
- *I asked [a friend] if he ever wanted to come over to my house. He was like, 'No, it's too ghetto. If I go over there, I've gotta bring a pocketknife.'*
- *Some people just won't talk to you... they're cautious around you.*
- *Sometimes... I'll be walking down the hallways and then a kid will like move away because somebody told me that everybody's scared of me 'cause [they think] Minneapolis kids are in gangs.*

According to students at 5 of the 19 schools, some teachers hold stereotypes as well. The comments they made in this regard included:

- *Teachers look at me like I'm low income.*
- *Since we're from Minneapolis, some teachers think that we're poor.*
- *Just because my pants were falling down one time, [one teacher] thinks I'm a gangster.*

Students at 4 of the 19 schools also mentioned that other students question their presence in the suburban district. One participant volunteered, "I've heard some comments, when [students] find out you live in Minneapolis... 'Why aren't you going to Minneapolis schools?' We're kind of like taking their tax money and moving in."

Finally, at just over half of the schools (10 of 19), students pointed out that many of the people at school are not aware they do not live in the district. "A lot of people don't really know until they see you walking home," explained one student. Another commented, "And I think that's good, that they keep it a secret."

Friendships

With nearly all of the students reporting that they have friends at school, focus group participants were asked about those friendships and how they compared to friendships at previous schools or in their neighborhood. Students at 11 of the 19 schools acknowledged that distance was an issue in their friendships with suburban classmates. Following are examples of these difficulties:

- *Friendships here are more school-related because... they live so far away that I can't go over and visit them. We talk on the phone, but I can't see them in person.*
- *I catch the city bus all the way out here and it comes once every couple hours, so it takes a long time to get over here.*
- *There's no way to get together with them, so there's really no point.*
- *It's kind of hard to hang out somewhere else if you live in Minneapolis. I mean, it's not impossible, but it's harder than if someone lives on your street or in your neighborhood.*

- *Even if they drive, they're like, 'I'm not driving all the way out to Minneapolis.'*
- *Some of my friends are kind of scared to come to Minneapolis to come pick me up... There's an image of Minneapolis as bad.*

Conversely, participants at 10 of 19 schools reported that regardless of the distance, they are able to get together with their suburban friends. "I either take a city bus, walk, or get a ride," announced one student. Another commented, "I ride the bus home with them."

Students at 10 of the 19 schools also alluded to the fact that their friendships with classmates are not as close as their friendships outside of school. Their remarks included:

- *I have people to talk to here in school, but I don't know if they are my real friends.*
- *I don't think they're as close 'cause I don't know them as well... They've known each other for a long time 'cause they've all been going to school together, so I kind of feel, in a way, left out.*

At 7 of 19 schools, participants characterized their school friendships as being different than their other friendships. Elaborations on this response included:

- *Way different. You have your friends in school and you have your friends outside of school. They're totally different.*
- *Friends here treat me with more respect. In Minneapolis, people don't care who you are.*
- *Yeah, it's different because the ones [in Minneapolis] get in too much trouble.*
- *I have friends from both [suburb and Minneapolis]. Here they talk way different... and they listen to way different music. Some listen to rock and we listen to rap and R&B.*
- *It's kind of different because I went to a pretty much all-black school, but there's not a lot of black kids here.*

At approximately one-quarter (5 of 19) of the schools, students described their friendships at school as being the same as their other friendships. Participants at a few of the schools, however, stated that they have less trust in their friends at school. "If you have a friend in the neighborhood, they won't spread rumors about you, but if you tell a secret to somebody in school, they'll tell everybody," noted one student.

Students at two of the schools also discussed their perception that they act differently with their school friends. As one remarked, "Outside of school, I'm way different. Because you feel like you have to be a certain way to be in this school—you have to act a certain way." At two schools, participants indicated that they do not have friends at school. "I don't think nobody in this school knows my home phone number," speculated one high school student. Finally, students at two schools noted that they are not friends with suburban students. As one participant articulated, "I try to hang out with people who live in Minneapolis. I don't like the proper kids. I don't like the kids who act how they act. I try to only hang out with people who I'm comfortable with."

Transportation

During the focus groups, participants were asked how they had gotten to school during the year and how well that had worked for them. The vast majority of students had taken the bus to and from school, with students from 14 of the 20 schools agreeing that the bus had worked well for them. Still, students noted a variety of transportation issues that need to be addressed. (For more details on the nature of transportation, see Section 1: Participation.)

At 16 of the schools, students commented about the availability of transportation when staying after school. In 8 of the schools, students said there was no activity bus for them to take if they stayed late, saying:

- *One thing I don't like is I stay after for independent study and they don't have an after school bus.*
- *I'm scared to stay after school 'cause I don't got no transportation to get home.*
- *If my mom can't pick me up, I gotta take the city bus home. Why don't we have an after school bus?*

At 6 of the schools, students explained that they had not been able to stay after school because they had no transportation home. Examples of their experiences included:

- *If my teacher says you have to stay after, I can't stay after because I don't have a ride... so I can't do anything after school.*
- *I wanted to stay after for track, but I didn't have a ride home.*

Although students at a few schools mentioned that they can stay after school if they make prior arrangements or that sometimes they are given a ride home by a staff member, students at other schools were unclear on their options for getting home if they stayed after school. These participants offered remarks such as following:

- *I thought they said that there was [an activity bus], but then I stayed after school once and tried to find the bus and nobody knew anything about it and I had to take a cab home.*
- *If you get the teacher to sign a note, you get a taxi, but they never really told everyone—it seems like a secret or something.*

Students at over half of the schools (11 of 20) voiced various complaints about their bus driver, using words such as “mean” or “careless.” Students at some schools also mentioned that substitute bus drivers can be problematic because they do not know the routes.

The fact that the bus schedule is not altered on early release or late start days was another issue raised at 8 schools. Examples of their remarks follow:

- *On late starts, the bus comes at the same time, so we get here at 8:30 instead of 10:15, but that kind of works out good because then you get here early and work on stuff.*

- *I don't like the bus system [on late start days]. The teachers don't like that either.*

Late arrival of buses was also mentioned at 7 of the 20 schools, with students complaining that they were late getting to school in the morning at the beginning of the year and, in some cases, throughout the school year. Students' frustrations included:

- *I have at least 11 tardies from the first quarter [due to the bus being late].*
- *In this school, if you get marked tardy, we get percents off our grade, and our bus is always late, every single day almost.*
- *In the morning, I be hungry, but I could never eat because when I get there, I get my food and sit down and then it's time to go, because our bus gets there so late.*

Getting up early in the morning was a topic raised at 6 of the schools. "I have to get up at 4:45 in the morning [and] catch the bus at 6:15," explained one participant. Finally, at a few of the schools, students mentioned the bus drops them off at school too early in the morning.

While students at 6 schools seemed to appreciate the option of taking cabs to and/or from school, they also identified some logistical issues:

- *There are some times when the teacher forgets to arrange a cab... then I have to go home, can't stay after school.*
- *They need to get somebody here at school to make sure that the cab is coming. It's happened like four times that the cab got canceled or was late.*
- *The cab company knows that if we're in sports, we have a standard way of staying after, and they'll still be like, 'No, the coach has to call.'... You can't abuse it, you're going from school to home, and they still be trippin'.*

At some of the schools, students addressed the topic of misbehavior, such as fighting, on their bus. Their comments included:

- *There's a lot of fights on the bus. Before [students] got kicked off, they was throwing stuff out the windows, loud, cursin'.*
- *I don't like the bus because I got jumped on the bus.*
- *People drive [the bus drivers] away. They do, because they're so bad. They're cussing at each other, starting fights. They have no respect at all.*

Finally, the length of the bus ride was pointed out at a few of the schools. "I know I live in Minneapolis and everything, but my bus ride is like an hour and 15 minutes long," lamented one participant.

Satisfaction with Suburban Schools

Focus group participants were asked four questions regarding their satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with their current school. The results from the questions "Tell me what you like best about this school" and "What has been one thing you really liked about this past year?" were combined and reported below as what students liked most about their school.

Similarly, students' responses to the questions, "What do you like least about this school?" and "What has been difficult for you about this past year?" were combined and reported as what students liked most about their school.

Like Most about the School

Students at 14 of the 20 schools announced that they most liked their teachers and for a variety of reasons. Examples of their remarks include:

- *I like the teachers because they're nice and you can tell that they care about you and they care how you do in school and they'll push you if you if you want to be pushed. In other schools, they could care less.*
- *You have some teachers that will stay after school and make sure you pass a class no matter how long it takes.*
- *Some teachers make you feel comfortable and safe.*
- *I like the teachers because they actually care about the students. At my old [Minneapolis middle school], the teachers were scared to death of the students, so we could do whatever we wanted. At this school, the teachers are not scared of the kids at all.*

At 12 of the schools, students shared that they appreciated the number and quality of extracurricular activities and/or sports offered at their schools. Specifically, they enjoyed the following:

- *They allow you to be a little more involved, like in extracurricular activities. They have a lot more clubs and things going on.*
- *My favorite part of this year was this youth leadership thing that I do with Youth Frontiers. It's been really fun. We get to do community service stuff.*
- *Another thing I liked about this year was being involved with drama—that was really fun.*

Students at a similar number of schools (12 of 20) discussed liking the classes at school. "They seem to have a lot of activities and a very wide variety of classes to choose from," observed one participant.

At 8 of the schools, participants acknowledged that they most liked the other students at the school. As one explained, "The kids that they've accumulated here are pretty good kids."

A better school climate was brought up by participants at 7 of the schools. Specifically, students submitted the following reflections:

- *I feel like I can concentrate on my studies. I think in a lot of other schools, there's some kind of... conflict. It's peaceful here.*
- *The learning environment is a lot better than the schools in Minneapolis. I think I learn more... I think the students are more involved and they seem more interested in what the teacher has to say.*

- *It's more safe here. At [Minneapolis high school], people could sneak in anytime. If a fight broke out, somewhat would get hurt.*
- *There's a lot more school spirit [than at Minneapolis high school].*

Students in 7 of the schools also appreciated the education that they were receiving in their suburban district. Their reasoning went as follows:

- *I think in Minneapolis schools, you're more of just another number, so even if you do have the abilities to go into a higher grade level or something, they're not really going to notice. Here, you're more of an individual and recognized for your talents and skills.*
- *I know when I talk to my cousin [who attends a Minneapolis high school] about schoolwork, it's like we learn more than they do.*
- *[I liked] passing the Basic Standards test.*

The higher quality school lunch was referred to at 7 of the schools, while students at some of the schools asserted that their friends had been what they liked the most about the past school year. At a few of the schools, students responded that they had enjoyed meeting new people. "There are some really, really great people that I'm so glad I met," shared one participant. Finally, students at a few of the schools named field trips as one of the best aspects of their year. As one participant said, "I like the field trips. They be going on way more field trips than Minneapolis schools."

Like Least about the School

At just over half (10 of 18) of the schools, focus group participants identified one or more teachers as their least favorite aspect of school. Their complaints included the following:

- *I don't like how they handle kids' behaviors. If we're being loud, I can understand that our teachers want us to be quiet, but sometimes they yell at us and say 'shut up' to us.*
- *Some of these teachers really do not know how to teach at all.*
- *Some of the teachers really don't care.*

The next most common response (raised in 7 of 18 schools) was that students were what they liked least. Examples of their statements included:

- *They don't respect the people that came from another country and they don't understand them.*
- *Some of them have real bad attitudes.*
- *Last year, I almost got into two fights. My advice for others is to watch who you call your friends.*

The school climate was alluded to at two of the schools as students' least favorite aspect. Examples of the specific issues raised included:

- *We have a lot of fights at lunch. Not a lot, but sometimes we do and I just think it's so stupid. I don't understand why they do it.*
- *It's not really diverse. There's not a lot of differences here.*

Students in a few schools also voiced their dissatisfaction with school lunches; school rules; the daily schedule; insufficient passing time between classes; unfair discipline policies (two schools); not enough activities; dissatisfaction with school administration (two schools); and transportation (two schools).

What Has Been Difficult

Asked what had been difficult for them about the past school year, responses bore some similarity to what students liked least about the school. The most commonly identified difficulty (14 of 18 schools) was the academic challenge at the suburban choice schools. Examples of students' remarks follow:

- *The work—it's hard to get good grades.*
- *They try to teach you in college terms.*
- *The academics is hard because I came from a school I went to for nine years and I was used to their program.*
- *It's just that the classes are a little more difficult and you can't really stay after school that much and get help.*
- *I was an A and B student when I came to this school. But now, I'm a C, D, and F student... if you're missing one assignment, your grade drops down a full letter grade.*

At 11 of the 18 schools, students identified the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of other students as their biggest source of difficulty at the school. Specifically, their issues included:

- *Just the behavior and attitude of other kids—so immature.*
- *Some students make fun of me or take off my scarf... Some people don't care [about consequences]. Maybe they have fun being suspended because they aren't coming to school.*
- *The attitude of the kids. They try to act as if they live in Minneapolis and consider themselves as ghetto people and it just gets annoying.*
- *I think these kids think they're better than the ghetto. I think they think they're better than the people that can't afford what they can afford.*
- *If you're not like them, don't talk like them, do what they do, and dress like them, then they don't accept you.*
- *They're really sheltered... A lot of them have really close-minded ideas about why the Choice kids are here. 'Why do they come here? There's tons of different schools they could go to, and most of them don't even try anyway. They all get F's.'*
- *Obviously, nobody in the Choice program can find common ground with the rich, popular girls, nor can you get along with them, but there's other ways you can get in with friends. Not all the people here are bad.*

- *I have this one friend and she's a different race and she goes and tells someone else that I come from a nigger family. I go and I asked her, 'Why did you say that? I didn't do anything to you.' Then there's big drama and talk in the bathroom.*

Complaints about teachers came up at 7 of the 18 schools. Asked to elaborate, they relayed examples such as the following:

- *[One teacher] doesn't understand. I used to not have very much computer access. One time I turned in a paper and some of it was handwritten and I got marked down a lot because of that.*
- *They could spend more time on explaining the work instead of just 'Get the book out and do that page.' Then when you ask them help, they don't help you.*
- *I just don't think that the teachers watch kids as well as they should.*

At two schools, students admitted that discipline had been problematic for them. "I never got expelled my whole life except in this school," lamented one participant. Learning English was the main difficulty for some students. As one respondent explained, "I didn't know much English... I try to learn more and more because when I go to some classes, I don't have people that talk in my language, so I have to try hard to learn English, to talk to my teachers."

Advice for *The Choice is Yours* Program

The final question posed to students during the focus groups was, "What advice do you have for the people that run *The Choice is Yours* program?" The most common piece of advice addressed transportation (9 of 19 schools). Specifically, students' suggestions included:

- *It would probably be impossible, but an after school bus program would be great.*
- *Instead of having a cab come get us from our school and dropping us off, there should be an after school bus like the regular buses.*
- *If you go to activities after school, see if the bus drivers can drop you off at your house or close by it 'cause it's scary in the winter when you go to walk by yourself all the way across town and stuff... something could happen.*
- *For late start, they should pick up the kids late. And early release [take them home early].*
- *Get more cameras on the bus 'cause getting jumped on the bus ain't fun.*
- *The bus drivers need to keep working so we don't have substitute bus drivers that don't know where they goin' because then they mess your whole schedule up and then we always be late.*

At 6 of 19 schools, students expressed interest in improved communication from the program. Their comments in this regard included:

- *I didn't even know I was in [The Choice is Yours] program.*
- *I think the people who are in The Choice is Yours program should be more informed of the different options you have, like [one student] wasn't aware that you could have a free computer or internet access.*

- *I haven't heard anything about it besides what I get in the mail—back at the beginning of the year... Somebody to check in with if something went wrong or if you have any questions or concerns.*
- *Show themselves. Let us know who they really are 'cause all we know is them as 'the program.' We don't know no specific people who are running it.*
- *Pick up their phone. They don't get back to you.*
- *I tried calling this program yesterday... over and over, but they kept saying it was disconnected.*

The advice from students at 4 of 19 schools was to continue the program. Their remarks included the following:

- *I would say to continue doing what they're doing and really believe in the kids.*
- *Just keep it. Don't get rid of it, because then you won't be able to go to school here. And other kids from Minneapolis won't have the choice.*

Students at 3 of 19 schools believed the program should be marketed more broadly to Minneapolis students. Examples of these comments were:

- *They should let people know about The Choice is Yours program because there's people that live over north that don't even know we have north side buses.*
- *There's a lot of stuff that they could do to make this program be more out there... All they got to do is get somebody to go to the high school and have a presentation telling them about The Choice is Yours program, send papers home to the parents. They just don't want to do it and I don't know why.*

At 2 of the 19 schools, students encouraged the program to hold high behavioral and academic expectations for *The Choice is Yours* students, voicing the following opinions:

- *I agree, though, with the school [for being strict] because I think it should be a privilege that we come here.*
- *Drop the bad kids out... All the bad kids from middle school are coming here [next year].*
- *I think we should be tested to get in here. Well, maybe not tested, but I think we should have to have maintained a C average at our old school because there are a lot of people that take advantage of the program and don't use it to their advantage. They don't try in classes and they blow homework off. I don't understand why you would choose to come all the way up here, wake up an hour early, to do nothing. I think they should somehow find a way to know that we are going to try when we come here, based on our grades at our old school, because I don't think people should be able to come here and just slack off. There's good programs here, but if you're not taking advantage of them or using them to your advantage, then there's no reason for you to be here.*

Satisfaction with *The Choice is Yours* program

While students were not asked specifically to share what they liked about *The Choice is Yours* program, participants in over a third of the focus groups spontaneously did just that. Examples of their praises of the program included:

- *I think it's pretty cool that there's a program like this... It's a good chance to go to a different school and get better learning.*
- *It's an advantage to bring more people of different cultures to come to this school that live all the way over north that don't have the transportation.*
- *Last year, we even had a meeting [of The Choice Is Yours students at the school] on what we thought we should change and things like that. I like that because the Choice program is new and they wanted to see how we felt about it thus far. The administration has been really good.*
- *I think it's a great program to be in. I really like it a lot... This program makes me feel like I can make it in school. When you have someone that's backing you up... they do care, they do want you to make it. That's something that keeps me going.*

Summary

As noted previously, the overall evaluation question guiding *The Choice is Yours* student focus groups was: “How do students in the inter-district transfer program interpret their school experiences?” The short answer to that question, based on 25 focus groups with 109 participating students, is: quite positively. Unless otherwise noted, the following summary statements are derived from themes that emerged at a majority of the schools (50% or more) involved in the study:

- Students enrolled in *The Choice is Yours* program in order to receive a higher quality education, because they and/or their parents were unhappy with the Minneapolis Public Schools; and/or because a friend or relative also attended the school.
- Students characterized their transition into their new school as easy (50% of students), difficult (28% of students), or in-between (22% students). The ease of students' transitions tended to be correlated with whether or not they already knew people or had friends at the suburban school and with how easily they made new friends.
- The vast majority of focus group participants indicated that they had felt welcome by students, teachers and administrators at the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, most students did not perceive that they had been treated differently by students or school staff, although they added that people do not necessarily know they live outside the district.
- At some of the schools (7 of 20), however, students felt they had been treated differently by teachers or administrators and characterized some of these experiences as less than desirable. Moreover, according to the focus group participants, many suburban students tend to have negative stereotypes about living in Minneapolis.

- Nearly all of the students reported that they have friends at school, although in many cases these relationships are not as close as other friendships they have. While the distance between urban and suburban homes can be an issue, students do find ways to get together outside of school with their suburban friends.
- The majority of students expressed their satisfaction with the teachers, classes, and opportunities for sports and extracurricular activities. Overall, students were also satisfied with the busing, despite giving many examples of room for improvement. Difficulties reported by participants tended to focus on teachers; other students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors; and academic challenges.

Appendix A:

Evaluation Design and Technical Notes

This appendix describes the evaluation and technical considerations related to the evaluation data presented in this report.

Evaluation Design

In February 2002, the Minnesota Department of Education awarded the evaluation of *The Choice Is Yours* evaluation to Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) in Aurora, Colorado. ASPEN Associates, a Minnesota-based subcontractor for McREL, designed and led the evaluation.

The state's 2002-2003 evaluation of *The Choice Is Yours* program focused primarily on the inter-district transfer program (suburban choice), but includes some data on the intra-district transfer (Minneapolis choice magnet) portion of the program. The evaluation includes comparisons of program participants to non-participants or other comparable groups. The state's 2002-2003 evaluation expands upon an earlier evaluation of *The Choice Is Yours* program as implemented within and conducted by the Robbinsdale Area Schools in 2001-2002. This earlier evaluation was also funded by the Minnesota Department of Education.

The topics addressed by the state's evaluation were:

- Academic Achievement and Program participation
- Parents' Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction
- School Responsiveness
- Student Experiences and Perspectives

Key data collection methods included:

- Parent telephone interviews
- Teacher surveys
- 3rd and 5th Grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment data
- 8th Grade Basic Skills Test data
- Student discipline data
- Student focus groups
- Program application and enrollment data

A summary of key questions answered by this evaluation (as noted in the original Request for Proposals) and the actual data sources for each topic are noted below.

Academic Achievement and Program Participation

1. What effect does participation in the program have on academic achievement, attendance, and discipline (as defined by the State data collection system) when compared with comparison groups of Minneapolis School District (MSD) students?

2. How do program participants compare to non-participants in the MSD?
3. Are parents receiving their desired choices, enrolling in their choice schools, and are they staying in their choice schools or returning to MSD?

Key data sources: (a) 3rd and 5th Grade Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments;
 (b) Minnesota 8th Grade Basic Skills Test;
 (c) Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS);
 (d) Program enrollment and participation records

Parent Reasons for Choice, Involvement, and Satisfaction: Parent Perspectives

4. Why are parents participating or not participating in the inter-district transfer program?
5. What types of information inform parents' decisions about the inter-district transfer program?
6. What schools and programs are most attractive to parents and why?
7. How satisfied are inter-district transfer program parents with their current choice?
8. How do schools recruit and welcome inter-district transfer program participants?
9. What effect does participation in the inter-district transfer program have on the types and levels of parent involvement and home-school communication?
10. What are inter-district transfer program parent perceptions of the racial climate in the schools and how does this compare to other parent perceptions?
11. According to parents, in what ways are schools addressing the needs of diverse students?

Key data sources: (a) 260 telephone interviews with parents of inter-district
 (suburban choice) and intra-district (Minneapolis choice
 magnet) students;
 (b) 270 total telephone interview with parents on non-participating
 students, including parents of eligible but non-participating
 students;
 (c) 155 surveys from parents of students already attending
 suburban schools

School Responsiveness: School Perspectives

12. How have suburban and magnet-receiving schools recruited and welcomed students participating in the inter-district transfer program?
13. What are the levels and types of home-school-community activities with which families participating in the inter-district transfer program may be involved?
14. What is the racial climate in the suburban and magnet schools?
15. What types of programs have schools implemented to address diversity?

Key data sources: (a) 380 school climate surveys completed by teachers at
 participating suburban choice schools;
 (b) 123 school climate surveys completed by teachers at
 Minneapolis choice magnet schools;

- (b) Interviews with WMEP Steering Committee members and the TCIY Family Liaison; and
- (c) District desegregation plans

Student Experiences and Perspectives

16. How do students in the inter-district transfer program interpret their school experiences?

Key data source: 25 focus groups with 6-8 inter-district transfer students from each of 20 middle, junior high, and high schools

Enrollment Data

Data on individual student enrollment in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) program was tracked by participating suburban school districts and maintained in a database by the Minneapolis Public Schools, Student Accounting Office. The Minneapolis Public Schools were responsible for collecting and maintaining individual student enrollment data on the intra-district transfer (Minneapolis choice) program. As noted in Appendix B: Program Implementation Barriers, the district encountered difficulty with the data systems it intended to use in this regard.

Achievement Data

To examine whether participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program had an impact on students' academic achievement, the initial evaluation plan called for an analysis of data from the Minnesota state assessments in grades 3, 5, and 8 and a cross-district analysis of standardized achievement data, with both analyses controlling for prior student achievement.

After only two years of implementation, however, the number of students enrolled in *The Choice Is Yours* program at the grade levels tested by the state assessments (grades 3, 5, and 8) was too small to conduct a cohort analysis on this data. Such an analysis is necessary to provide data on students' prior achievement by linking, for example, students' 3rd grade scores to their 5th grade scores. As enrollment in the program increases over time, a cohort analysis of the Minnesota state assessments will likely be feasible.

Initial plans to conduct a cross-district analysis of changes in student performance for participants and non-participants using standardized achievement data from participating school districts had to be set aside until the relationships among some of the key stakeholders in *The Choice Is Yours* program could support the level of cross-district collaboration required to plan and conduct this analysis.³⁷ Such an analysis is planned for next year, when five school districts will compare the achievement of participants to non-participants in an

³⁷ Given the nature of the Northwest Achievement Level Tests, a number of technical issues must be collaboratively addressed by the assessment directors in each of districts to ensure that the cross-district comparisons are conducted appropriately. Many of the key issues have already been identified by the assessment directors; despite these issues, the group agrees that a cross-district comparison is indeed feasible.

analysis of data from the Northwest Achievement Level Tests.³⁸ These analyses will examine student achievement data from the first three years of *The Choice Is Yours* program for suburban choice participants, Minneapolis choice participants, and eligible, non-participants and will include an analysis of key factors known to influence student achievement (e.g., prior achievement, attendance, mobility, socioeconomic status and other student demographics).

For the time being, the data from the Minnesota state assessments in grades 3, 5, and 8 were analyzed for suburban choice and eligible, non-suburban choice participants without controlling for prior achievement. In addition to participant/non-participant status, no other factors were examined in these analyses. All students, by virtue of their being *eligible* to participate in the program were eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches.

Without data on students' prior achievement levels (that is, whether students who chose to attend suburban choice schools were performing at, above, or below other eligible students) the findings from the current data, while interesting are not sufficient to determine the extent to which these differences are due to participation in *The Choice Is Yours* program. The findings are presented here to acquaint the reader with the types of analyses that may be conducted in the future, should the number of students enrolled in the tested grade levels increase to appropriate levels with the continued growth of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Attendance Data

Official student attendance data for the previous school year becomes available in October of the following school year. Consequently, only one year of data was available at the time of this evaluation.

Discipline Data

Examination of the available data on student discipline revealed several threats to validity and reliability, most notably due to the wide variation in the ways in which disciplinary actions are instituted across different schools and districts, and general discrepancies in the discipline policies across districts. As an example, some districts have a “zero tolerance” policy whereby a student displaying a particular behavior is automatically suspended from school while in another district the standard policy suggests an alternative action for the same behavior. In addition to differing policies across districts, the implementation of policies and accuracy of reporting within districts varies considerably. As a result, both state and district records of common disciplinary actions suffer from poor reliability and validity. For these reasons, no analysis of official student discipline data was conducted for the evaluation. In lieu of school reports of student behavior, this evaluation includes data from parent and teacher surveys on perceptions of disciplinary actions taken in the schools.

³⁸ Edina, Hopkins, Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, and Wayzata all administer the Northwest Achievement Level Tests which are aligned with state standards and administered annually across a continuous span of grade levels (e.g., grades 4-8), thus allowing for analysis of change.

Parent Surveys

Sampling and Response Rates

The approved evaluation plan and budget called for 250 telephone interviews with parents of students participating in the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* and 250 with parents of comparable, non-participating students. In the final evaluation, five subgroups of the parent population were sampled to represent participating and non-participating students:

Participants:

1. Suburban choice schools (inter-district transfer participants)
2. Minneapolis choice schools (intra-district transfer participants)

Non-participants:

3. Eligible, non-participants (eligible to participate but chose neither inter-district nor intra-district transfer option)
4. Ineligible, non-participants, suburban choice schools
5. Ineligible, non-participants, Minneapolis choice schools

In spring 2003, a proportional random sample of parents was drawn within each population subgroup by grade level (grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) using student enrollment records. When a parent was drawn more than once (for the same or a different sample), because the family had more than one child enrolled in one or more of the five populations of interest, the duplicate selections were replaced through another round of random sampling.

Due to a lack of placement and enrollment data for students entering Minneapolis choice magnet schools under *The Choice Is Yours* program, the sample of parents drawn to represent this population for the parent interviews was based on the population of all students attending a Minneapolis choice magnet school who were eligible to attend through the program. As such, this sample of parents may include parents of students who were placed into these schools under other priority placements, such as sibling preference or ELL preference, or parents of students who had enrolled in the school prior to the start of *The Choice Is Yours* program. Given the nature of questioning in the parent interviews, this method of sampling was considered appropriate.

The final evaluation data presented in this report includes a total of 685 parent surveys: 260 with parents of participating students, 135 with parents of eligible, non-participants, and 290 with parents of ineligible, non-participants. Of the 685 parent surveys, 530 were conducted by telephone using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) system, including 74 translated into Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. The remaining 155 surveys, which included only school climate items, were conducted as mail surveys with the suburban choice, non-participants.

The response rates for the parent surveys ranged from 65% for the suburban choice, non-participants to 80% for the Minneapolis choice, non-participants. The overall response rate for the parent surveys was 72%. The overall cooperation rate – number of completions based on actual contact with the selected person – was 78% for the parent interviews. Overall, only 6% of parents contacted for an interview actively refused to participate. See Table A1 for a summary of response rates and number of completed parent surveys by sample.

Table A1: Response rates for *The Choice Is Yours* parent surveys.

Sample	Response Rate	Cooperation Rate ²	Number completes	% Refusals ⁴	% Not Reachable ³
All Parents	72 %	78 %	685	6 %	31 %
Suburban choice, participant	72	72	136	8	31
Minneapolis choice, participant	71	75	124	7	36
Eligible, non-participant	72	78	135	5	36
Minneapolis choice, non-participant	80	83	135	7	16
Suburban choice, non-participant ¹	65	n.a.	155	n.a.	n.a.

Notes: ¹ Administered as mail survey. All other samples participated in telephone survey.

² Cooperation rate = (completions) / (potential interviews). Potential interviews are defined as all instances where contact was made with the selected person.

³ Not reachable is the eligible sample for which the telephone numbers provided were incorrect or no longer in service.

⁴ Refusals are the eligible sample for which the selected person declined to participate in the telephone survey.

“n.a.” = not applicable to mail surveys.

Source: Sampling records.

General Comments on the Robustness of the Data

Table A1 also presents data on the quality of the sampling information for the parent telephone interviews. Overall, 31-36% of the parents whose child was eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* and who were selected for a telephone interview were categorized as “not reachable” at the telephone number provided by the school district. This rate was much lower for parents of students in the intra-district comparison group; that is, parents whose child was attending a Minneapolis choice magnet school (16%) but was not eligible for free or reduced price lunches and therefore not eligible to enroll in the school under *The Choice Is Yours* program. This data suggests one of the limitations encountered when surveying a highly mobile population.

Another consideration for the parent survey results presented in this study is the method of sampling. When a simple random sample is drawn it is appropriate to calculate sampling error and to comment on the generalizability of results from the sample to the population. In this study, a *proportional* sample with simple random sampling within subgroups of the primary population of interest – parents of students who were eligible to participate in *The Choice Is Yours* program – was conducted to ensure a minimum sample size to support comparisons across subgroups (e.g., participants and non-participants). The minimum target of 125 parents in each of the key subgroups (i.e., suburban choice participants, Minneapolis choice participants, and eligible non-participants) was achieved for a total of 395 surveys completed by parents of eligible students. Although not a true *simple random* sample,

because of the proportional sampling within groups, it is still appropriate to report that the sampling error for this population is +/- 5%. The sampling error and fact that response rates over 70% suggest that the results of the parent surveys are generalizable to the larger population of eligible parents.

Respondent Characteristics

The typical respondent for the parent survey, across subgroups, was the child's mother or female guardian. Because no data exists on the population characteristics of parents, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the characteristics of respondents to the parent survey reflect the general population. Nonetheless, the reader may wish to examine Table A2, which presents respondent characteristics, to Table A3, which presents similar characteristics of the student population from which the parent sample was drawn.

Table A2: Respondent characteristics for *The Choice Is Yours* parent survey.

	Sample					Significance	
	Suburban Choice		Minneapolis Choice		Eligible, Non-partic. (n=135)		
	Partic. (n=136)	Non-partic. (n=155)	Partic. (n=124)	Non-partic. (n=135)		Chi-sq	d.f.
Relationship to Child							
Mother/female guardian	80.1%	81.2%	80.6%	70.4%	76.9%	.212	12
Father/male guardian	14.7	18.2	15.3	25.9	17.9		
Grandparent	2.2	0.6	2.4	3.0	2.2		
Other relative	2.9	0.0	1.6	0.7	3.0		
Other non-relative	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Race of respondent							
Amer. Indian/Alaskan	1.5%	1.3%	4.1%	1.5%	2.3%	.000***	24
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.0	3.9	5.8	3.8	23.3		
Hispanic	4.5	2.6	26.4	6.0	14.3		
Black, non-Hispanic ¹	47.8	4.6	38.0	21.1	52.6		
White, non-Hispanic	38.1	83.6	24.0	65.4	5.3		
Multiracial	3.7	2.6	1.7	1.5	0.0		
Other	1.5	1.3	0.0	0.8	2.3		
Language spoken most often at home							
English	90.2%	n.a.	69.1%	88.1%	57.8%	.000***	3
Other language	9.8	n.a.	30.9	11.9	42.2		

***p<=.001

Notes: ¹ Including Liberian, Somali, etc.

Source: 2003 Parent Interview Q38, Q39, Q40; 2003 Parent Survey Q5, Q6

Table A3: Estimates of population characteristics for *The Choice Is Yours* parent survey based on characteristics of student.

	Population				
	Suburban Choice		Minneapolis Choice		Eligible, Non-partic. (n=28220)
	Partic. (n=720)	Non-partic. (n=48910)	Partic. (n=798)	Non-partic. (n=4475)	
Race of student					
Amer. Indian/Alaskan	1.6%	n.a.	5.2%	4.0%	4.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	9.4	n.a.	9.0	7.2	21.0
Hispanic	6.9	n.a.	31.5	13.4	14.3
Black, non-Hispanic ¹	54.4	n.a.	48.2	28.5	57.2
White, non-Hispanic	27.8	n.a.	9.8	46.8	3.1
Student has limited English proficiency					
No	88.4%	n.a.	58.1%	85.9%	63.5%
Yes	11.6	n.a.	41.9	14.1	36.5

Source: *The Choice Is Yours* enrollment records, Minneapolis UNISYS data for free and reduced price lunch students, and suburban choice school student records for 2002-2003.

Teacher Surveys

Sampling and Response Rates

The approved evaluation plan and budget called for 300 school climate surveys to be completed by teachers in suburban choice schools. Additional school climate surveys were added later to include feedback from teachers in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools. A proportional random sample of K-12 teachers having direct student contact and FTEs of 0.75 or greater was drawn within the eight suburban school districts and the ten choice magnet schools in spring 2003. All teacher surveys were mailed to the schools along with a cover letter addressed to the teacher, describing the purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and the confidential and voluntary nature of the study. Teachers received a follow-up reminder card.

The final evaluation data presented in this report includes a total of 506 school climate surveys completed by teachers with 380 being completed by teachers in the suburban choice schools and an additional 123 surveys completed by teachers in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools. The response rate for suburban choice teachers was 64% and 72% for Minneapolis choice teachers; the overall response rate for the teacher surveys was 66%. See Table A4 for a summary of response rates and number of completed teacher surveys.

Table A4: Response rates for *The Choice Is Yours* teacher surveys.

Sample	Response Rate	Number completes
All Teachers ¹	66 %	506
Suburban choice	64	380
Minneapolis choice	72	123

Notes: ¹ Administered as mail survey.

Source: Sampling records.

General Comments on the Robustness of the Data

Another consideration for the results of the teacher survey data presented in this study is the method of sampling. As noted above, when a simple random sample is drawn it is appropriate to calculate sampling error and to comment on the generalizability of results from the sample to the population. In this study, a *proportional* sample with simple random sampling within subgroups of the primary population of interest – teachers at suburban choice and Minneapolis choice magnet schools – was conducted to ensure representation across the participating suburban districts and/or Minneapolis magnet schools. The minimum target of 300 teachers from the suburban choice schools and 100 teachers from Minneapolis choice magnet schools was achieved for a total of 506 surveys completed by teachers at participating schools. Although not a true *simple random* sample, because of the proportional sampling within groups, it is still appropriate to report that the sampling error for this population is +/- 4%. The sampling error and fact that response rates over 64% suggest that the results of the parent surveys are fairly generalizable to the larger population of teachers.

Respondent Characteristics

The typical respondent for the teacher survey for both the suburban choice and Minneapolis choice magnet schools was a white, female, classroom teacher (see Table A5). Teachers from all grade levels represented in the suburban choice schools responded to the survey, as did teachers from the K-8 Minneapolis choice schools. Teachers in the suburban choice schools had been teaching an average of 14 years, with half of the teacher having taught for more than 10 years. Teachers in the Minneapolis choice magnet schools had taught an average of 16 years, with half having taught for more than 13 years. In considering teachers' perceptions of school climate, the length of time they have been teaching in their current school is important. The data in Table A5 indicate that the vast majority of teachers in both suburban choice (77%) and Minneapolis choice schools (80%) had been teaching at their schools since before *The Choice Is Yours* program was implemented, giving them a before and after perspective.

Table A5. Characteristics of respondents to *The Choice Is Yours* teacher survey in suburban choice schools and Minneapolis choice magnet schools.

Percent		
	Suburban Choice Schools	Minneapolis Choice Magnet Schools
Percent female	75.7	74.8
Percent of color	4.8	9.1
Grade level(s) currently teaching ¹		
Elementary school (K-5)	45.4	82.9
Middle or junior high school (6-8)	27.1	17.1
High school (9-12)	27.6	1.6
Primary teaching role		
teacher	77.9	77.0
specialist	17.1	18.0
other	5.0	4.9
# Years teaching at current school		
1-2 years	23.1	19.5
5 or fewer	54.0	39.8
6-10	19.7	24.4
11-20	19.9	31.7
21-30	4.3	4.1
more than 30	2.1	0.0
Mean	7.6 yrs	8.1 yrs
(s.d.)	(7.12)	(5.88)
Median	5.0 yrs	7.0 yrs
# Years teaching		
5 or fewer	27.5	14.6
6-10	25.7	23.0
11-20	23.0	30.1
21-30	13.8	26.0
more than 30	10.1	6.4
Mean	13.6 yrs	15.7 yrs
(s.d.)	(10.48)	(9.50)
Median	10.0	13.0

Note: ¹ Respondents could check more than one level.

Source: 2003 Teacher Opinion Survey for West Metro Schools (n=380 suburban; n=123 Minneapolis).

Student Focus Groups

Sampling

The sample for the focus groups included all *The Choice Is Yours* students enrolled at middle, junior high, and high schools with at least six students participating in the program. Based on enrollment records as of April 2003, 20 of the 23 secondary schools fit into this category.

The sample of students in each school was stratified to ensure representation from each grade level with students being selected randomly within each grade. Additionally, once a student's

name was drawn, any siblings of that child who attended the same school were excluded from the list. Students in the Robbinsdale Area Schools who had participated in a *The Choice Is Yours* focus group conducted by the district in the spring of 2002 were excluded as well. A total of eight students were selected from each of the 20 schools, with the exception of one school, which had only six *The Choice Is Yours* students enrolled; in that case, all six students were selected.

Overall, a total of 109 students from 20 middle, junior high, and high schools in eight districts participated in 25 focus groups held between April 24 and May 13, 2003. Each group consisted of two to eight students and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

General Comments on the Robustness of the Data

Focus group methods are not meant to provide statistically representative data. Rather, with careful attention to sampling and the manner in which the focus groups are conducted this method can provide a richness of information that is more difficult to obtain through more quantitative survey data. The focus group results presented in this report may appropriately be used to expand upon findings based upon the other, more quantitative data (e.g., parent and teacher surveys) and to obtain a sense of the ways in which students articulate their experiences in *The Choice Is Yours* schools.

Informed Consent

In April, 2003, an informational letter was mailed home to all parents of students participating in *The Choice Is Yours* program to inform them of the larger evaluation study being conducted in their school districts. This letter described the purpose of the overall study, the data collection methods, how the data would be used, and described the confidential and the voluntary nature of participation. Parents whose children's names had been selected to participate in a focus group were notified of this in the same letter. A telephone number was also provided in case they had any questions about the study or wished to withdraw their child's name from the sample. In addition, at the beginning of each focus group students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that anyone who did not wish to participate could leave at that time.³⁹

Also in April 2003, an informational letter was sent to the West Metro Education Program Steering Committee members in each of the school districts who forwarded it on to district and school administrators. Like the letter mailed to parents, this one explained the purpose of the evaluation, data collection methods, how the data would be used, and the confidential and voluntary nature of participation. It also noted key timelines and expectations for involvement on the part of district and school staff.

³⁹ Some students elected to leave after arriving at the focus group and being informed of the voluntary nature of participation. Other students simply did not attend. While a few parents called for more information on the focus groups, no parents requested that their child not participate.

Scheduling

Follow-up telephone calls were then made to a contact person at each school—typically a principal, counselor, or administrative assistant—to schedule an appropriate time to conduct the focus group. In several cases, the contact person informed the evaluators that one or more students selected for participation were no longer enrolled at the school. When possible, additional names were drawn and informational letters again mailed to parents.

Since the focus groups were conducted during the school day, each contact person was provided with, and encouraged to distribute, a notice to the teachers whose students would be participating, as well as a note inviting the students to attend. In the five instances where focus group attendance was low (e.g., two participants), a second focus group was scheduled and additional students invited. In these cases, the results from both groups were combined for purposes of analysis.

Participant Characteristics

Table A6 below presents the demographic characteristics of the 109 students whose voices are reflected in this report. As the table shows, over three-quarters (78%) of the focus group participants were students of color and just over half (56%) were female. Students in grades six through eight accounted for half of the participants, with the smallest representation coming from grade 12. The majority (70%) of students had been attending the district for one or two years, with the average length of time being 2.3 years.

Table A6: Characteristics of students participating in *The Choice is Yours* focus groups.

	Number	%
All Participants	109	100.0
District		
Columbia Heights	9	8.3
Edina	19	17.4
Hopkins	8	7.3
Richfield	10	9.2
Robbinsdale	23	21.1
St. Anthony/New Brighton	14	12.8
St. Louis Park	8	7.3
Wayzata	18	16.5
Students of Color	85	78.0
Female	61	56.0
Grade		
6	20	18.3
7	17	15.6
8	18	16.5
9	22	20.2
10	17	15.6
11	10	9.2
12	5	4.6
Number of Years in District (Ave. =2.3 years)		
1	46	42.6
2	30	27.8
3	14	13.0
4	7	6.5
5 or more	11	10.2
Had heard of <i>The Choice is Yours</i>	65	60.2
Aware of participation in program	47	43.5

Source: 2003 Focus group participation records.

Appendix B:

Program Implementation Barriers

When organizations work together to achieve a common goal – as a formal collaborative⁴⁰ or another form of partnership – they inevitably encounter barriers that can hinder the group’s effectiveness. This section discusses some of the more salient barriers encountered by the program partners charged with implementing *The Choice Is Yours* – Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis NAACP, Minnesota Department of Education, and the eight suburban school districts – as observed by the program evaluator during the first two years of the program.⁴¹ These observations are included here as context to enlighten the reader about circumstances that had a noticeable effect on the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours* program and/or its evaluation. The reader is cautioned that this is not a comprehensive listing of barriers and it is not based on a formal process of data gathering that engaged all of the program partners. The evaluator has recommended that *The Choice Is Yours* program partners engage in a formal process of reflection on the supports and barriers to an effective collaboration or partnership in their upcoming discussions of the evaluation results.

The salient implementation barriers presented here are commonly characterized as “relationship” and “resource” barriers.

Relationship Barriers

Competition for Resources

The most prominent barrier with regard to relationships among the program partners was the *perception of competition for resources and/or students*; an issue that is not uncommon in the arena of school choice and one that affected the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours* program, specifically its outreach efforts.

In Minnesota, some amount of local (district) funding is generated by student enrollment. These per pupil funding formulas, however, vary across districts such that a student might generate more funding in one district than another. Consequently, when a student who is a

⁴⁰ The developmental continuum of collaboration begins with organizations exchanging information among members (“networking”), altering their activities in light of developments within the group (“coordinating”), sharing resources with one another (“cooperating”), and ultimately enhancing the capacity of the members (“collaboration”) for the purpose of achieving a commonly held goal. See Himmelman, A.T. (1995). *Collaboration for a Change: Definitions, Models, Roles, and a Guide to Collaborative Processes*.

⁴¹ This summary of barriers among program partners was prepared post-hoc at the request of the client -- the Minnesota Department of Education -- to provide additional context regarding the implementation of *The Choice Is Yours* program. As such, the assessment of barriers is based solely on an after-the-fact review of informal participant-observations made by the program’s evaluator at the various program partners meetings held monthly throughout the first and second years of *The Choice Is Yours*. Formal participant-observation protocols were not included in the approved evaluation design that was prepared by the evaluator in collaboration with the program partners.

Minneapolis resident enrolls in a suburban choice district under *The Choice Is Yours* program, the student's per pupil funding does not "follow" the student. Rather, the student no longer generates revenue in the Minneapolis school district because he or she is now generating revenue in the new district of enrollment based on a new funding formula. While the relationship between the Minneapolis Public School district and the suburban choice districts was *never* characterized as a "competition" for students by any of the program partners, the fiscal realities of students leaving a district and thus no longer generating revenues quickly emerged as an important issue for consideration in implementing *The Choice Is Yours* as outlined in the legal settlement.

Early on in the program's implementation, the fiscal implications related to changes in student enrollment were raised in discussions between the state and the school districts with regard to the role of the suburban school districts in outreach efforts being coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Education. These discussions highlighted a conflict between the state's perception of outreach as "sharing information on *all* school choice options with parents" and concerns expressed by the suburban districts that their involvement in outreach around the inter-district transfer (suburban choice) component might be construed as "actively recruiting students away from the Minneapolis Public Schools." The conversations illustrated that the suburban districts could relate to the challenges that arise when a district "loses" a significant number of students each year to other school choices, particularly in terms of the loss of student-generated revenues. Another challenge the districts resonated with was the difficulty in planning staffing and classroom configurations for the upcoming school year when projected enrollments could change significantly as students exercise their choice options *throughout* the year and not by the January 15 deadline.

To further clarify the perceived and actual implications of school choice options being weighed by the program partners, the reader is asked to consider the following data. As a result of the legal settlement, the program partners were to work together to ensure that a minimum of 500 priority placement slots be held for *The Choice Is Yours* students each year – a total of 2000 students over four years – enrolled in the suburban choice option under *The Choice Is Yours* program. During the first two years of the program, a total of 1079 students were enrolled in the suburban choice program at some point in time.⁴² As *The Choice Is Yours* program entered its third year, the Minneapolis Public Schools released trend data indicating that in the last five years the district had lost 5500 students to various choice options (including private schools, charter schools, open enrollment, and *The Choice Is Yours* program). During that time, the number of school-age residents in Minneapolis was, on average, approximately 50,000.

As the program partners worked to resolve their conflicting views of outreach, some of the state's plans for outreach activities were delayed and/or altered. Throughout the first two years of the program, suburban districts struggled to define a role they could comfortably assume in the outreach process being proposed and led by the Minnesota Department of Education. This issue remains unresolved at this time.

⁴² Not all of the 1079 students remained in the program. See later discussions of program enrollment in this report.

Resource Barriers

Closely related to the *perceived competition for resources* are two barriers posed by the resources of program partners. One barrier – *turnover of key representatives* – affected the implementation of both the inter-district (suburban choice) and intra-district (magnet choice) programs. The other resource barrier – *inadequate data systems* – affected the implementation and evaluation of the intra-district (Minneapolis choice magnet school) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

Turnover of Key Representatives

The *turnover of key representatives for three of the program partners* – Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota Department of Education, and the Minneapolis NAACP – during the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program affected the implementation of process as responsibilities were reassigned and, in some cases, new staff members were brought on board. In Minneapolis, district was initially represented by the Executive Director and the Director of Planning and Policy Services. These individuals brought with them an intimate knowledge of the events leading up to the lawsuit and the negotiations that informed the legal settlement. After their departure, the district's Equal Opportunity and Diversity Director was assigned the role of representing Minneapolis at key meetings. During this time, the participation of Minneapolis was limited until a new Coordinator of Student Placement was hired and eventually took over as the Minneapolis representative. During the first two years of the program, the Director of the Office of Equity at the Minnesota Department of Education also left to take another position outside of the agency. Finally, the Minneapolis NAACP struggled internally with turnover at the leadership level resulting in three different NAACP members attending program partner meetings. The interests of the NAACP were, however, consistently represented at such meetings by their legal counsel.

All in all, there was significant amount of turnover among key representatives during the first two years of *The Choice Is Yours* program. As responsibilities were reassigned to new people, the important tasks of creating a shared understanding (both within and across program partners) and of developing a level of trust that would support the joint efforts of the program partners had to be revisited. The extent to which these tasks were attended to and whether this was accomplished in an intentional manner is unknown, as is the perceived effectiveness of this socialization of new representatives.

Inadequate Data Systems

The second resource barrier, *inadequate systems for gathering data for decision-making and evaluation*, was encountered in the Minneapolis Public Schools and affected the availability of data on the enrollment of students in the intra-district (Minneapolis choice magnet) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program.

At the beginning of *The Choice Is Yours* program, Minneapolis Public Schools did not have an existing electronic system for tracking student applications and placement nor for linking this data to actual enrollment into its choice magnet schools. Consequently, the Minneapolis

district office of Planning and Policy Services tabulated the application and placement data for the Minneapolis choice magnet schools for the first year of the program by hand, culling information from students' School Request Cards.

During the first year of the program, the district began working with a consultant to develop a database to track public school applications and placement data for *all* K-12 students. This database was intended to provide, among other things, key data on the intra-district component of *The Choice Is Yours*; including, the number of students requesting Minneapolis choice magnet schools, how many of these students were eligible to receive priority placement through *The Choice Is Yours* program, and whether these eligible students were receiving their first or second choice when requesting a choice magnet school. The database was also to include demographic data and priority placement information for all students. Finally, an accompanying district student identification number would allow the application and placement data to be linked to the district's UNISYS database which includes students' state identification (MARSS) number. The availability of students' MARSS numbers would facilitate further examination of enrollment data, including whether students actually enrolled in their school of choice and whether they stayed in the school or withdrew.

Complications were encountered, however, in the development of the application and placement database delaying its completion. Backup plans to manually cull this information from Student Request Cards for the second year of the program were nullified by annual updates to the internal record-keeping/application processing systems within the placement office and the sheer volume of Student Request Cards that would need to be carefully compared to other data sources in order to identify the choice magnet school applications and placement data, given the changes in office protocols.⁴³ As such, no application or placement data was available for the intra-district (Minneapolis choice magnet) portion of *The Choice Is Yours* program in year two. In addition, attempts to link year one choice magnet school application and placement data – when such data was able to be tabulated by hand – to actual enrollment data were deemed unfeasible given the sheer volume of Student Request Cards. This data will, however, be available for the 2003-2004 school year as the database was eventually completed.

With regard to the suburban choice application and placement data, a system was developed early on by the Minneapolis Student Accounting Office. This database was critical in allowing the evaluator to link placement data to actual student enrollment data for the evaluation of the inter-district transfer program. This system was maintained throughout the first two years of the program through the collaborative efforts of the suburban choice districts and the Minneapolis Student Accounting Office. The database included information from the application forms with confirmation of actual enrollment being provided by the suburban districts on a regular basis. The suburban choice application and placement

⁴³ Each year, it is not uncommon for student placement offices to make adjustments to their record-keeping and/or processing procedures to accommodate new regulations and policies. In 2002-03, school districts nationwide were updating their systems to address the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*. Regardless of any necessary updates, the placement process is complex, involving numerous steps and participants. While an electronic data system can provide additional safeguards to increase the consistency of data entry and data management, no system – electronic or manual -- is completely error-free.

database supported a number of important analyses which were conducted by the Minneapolis Student Accounting Office; the results of which are included in this report.